



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**CLAN POLITICS: A CRITICAL ROLE IN RESOLVING  
MUSLIM CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

by

Vincent Arnold O. Dy

June 2022

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Tristan J. Mabry  
Feroz H. Khan

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> June 2022	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> CLAN POLITICS: A CRITICAL ROLE IN RESOLVING MUSLIM CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Vincent Arnold O. Dy				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b> A	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> <p>In 2019, after decades of peace negotiations between the government of the Philippines (GPH) and Muslim separatist groups, the Philippines launched the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). However, in addition to the Moro separatist groups, clans also play a critical role in the region by dominating the political space. This thesis examines the contentious role of clan politics in the negotiations leading to the creation and implementation of the BARMM. It finds that clan politics contributed to the failure of past peace agreements due to corruption and inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic clan violence, often caused by land disputes and the quest for power and resources. Clan violence is also often associated with private armed groups (PAG). The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), used to create the BARMM, addressed many issues related to clan politics. This is evident in the BARMM's adoption of a parliamentary form of government, establishment of an internal and state audit system for accounting of government resources, and the disarmament of PAGs. However, the BARMM's success may depend on the sustainment of programs stipulated in the BOL, the complete disarmament of the PAGs and the strengthening of regional and local government institutions.</p>				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> BARMM, ARMM, GPH, Autonomy, clan, clan politics, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Bangsamoro Organic Law			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 97	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

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**CLAN POLITICS: A CRITICAL ROLE IN RESOLVING MUSLIM CONFLICT  
IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Vincent Arnold O. Dy  
Colonel, Philippine Army  
BS, Philippine Military Academy, 1994

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(COMBATING TERRORISM: POLICY AND STRATEGY)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
June 2022**

Approved by: Tristan J. Mabry  
Advisor

Feroz H. Khan  
Second Reader

Afshon P. Ostovar  
Associate Chair for Research  
Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2019, after decades of peace negotiations between the government of the Philippines (GPH) and Muslim separatist groups, the Philippines launched the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). However, in addition to the Moro separatist groups, clans also play a critical role in the region by dominating the political space. This thesis examines the contentious role of clan politics in the negotiations leading to the creation and implementation of the BARMM. It finds that clan politics contributed to the failure of past peace agreements due to corruption and inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic clan violence, often caused by land disputes and the quest for power and resources. Clan violence is also often associated with private armed groups (PAG). The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), used to create the BARMM, addressed many issues related to clan politics. This is evident in the BARMM's adoption of a parliamentary form of government, establishment of an internal and state audit system for accounting of government resources, and the disarmament of PAGs. However, the BARMM's success may depend on the sustainment of programs stipulated in the BOL, the complete disarmament of the PAGs and the strengthening of regional and local government institutions.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AGCH	Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CAFGU	Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit
COA	Commission on Audit
COMELEC	Commission on Elections
CVO	Civilian Volunteers Organization
GPH	Government of the Philippines
ICAPA	Independent Commission Against Private Armies
IRA	Internal Revenue Allotment
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MIM	Muslim Independence Movement
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NTG	National Task Group
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PAG	Private Armed Group
PNP	Philippine National Police
SPCPD	Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere and whole-hearted appreciation goes to the following who made my NPS journey truly rewarding and unforgettable:

To God Almighty, for the safety, good health, continuous blessing and guidance.

To Professors Tristan Mabry and Feroz Khan, my thesis advisor and second reader, respectively, for the patience, guidance, and invaluable support in continuously raising my spirits in making this study as comprehensive and as scholarly as possible.

To the Graduate Writing Center, especially to Cheryldee Huddleston and Michelle Morneau, for painstakingly assisting me in this thesis. You guys definitely made scholarly writing a lot easier.

To the NPS Filipino community, for keeping each other sane despite the voluminous requirements of our respective courses.

To the Filipino community in California, for the support and camaraderie you provided my family and me, making our stay here truly memorable. Special mention to Pipoy and Alona Cantillep, Masoud and Elizabeth Jafari, Willy and Baguin Abadilla, Cesar and Rem Sotto, and Encar Arenas for welcoming and making us part of your families.

To our family back home, Nanay and Taynee, for taking care of our needs while we were away.

To my siblings, Selina Theresa and Kathleya, with your respective families, for love, all-out support, fun, and bonding moments in places that every Filipino dreams of.

To my beloved family: my wife Sonching, words are not enough to express the love and the gratitude for your selfless and enduring love throughout our journey here. You kept me company even in the most challenging times and for that I am eternally grateful. To my children Vivienne and Audric, for your love, patience, and understanding. You guys continuously inspire me in my career of service to the country.

This achievement is for all of you. Mabuhay tayong lahat!!!

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

The Philippines is mired in decades-old Muslim resistance and rebellion in the south. In order to find a resolution to the conflicts that have affected the Southern Philippines in particular, the Government of the Philippines (GPH) forged agreements with the leading separatist groups: initially, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and then the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

In 2019, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established to resolve the decades-long Moro Muslim secessionist movement in the Southern Philippines.<sup>1</sup> Although the BARMM provides for an election of new leaders by 2025, it may have overlooked a critical variable: the contentious role of clan politics, a perennial spoiler of past attempts at conflict resolution in the region. This study posits clan politics may be a key factor in the success or failure of the BARMM. Hence, this thesis will pose the following question: how did the negotiations that led to the BARMM address or fail to address the role of clan politics? Moreover, what does this suggest for the implementation of BARMM provisions going forward?

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

Muslims in the southern part of the Philippines, specifically the islands of Mindanao, narrate stories of past and present struggles to preserve their identity, heritage, and aspirations. As a result, conflicts emanating from deeply rooted causes, including claims for lost ancestral domains, fueled the separatists' insurgency. As leaders were drawn to diplomacy and peace accords, various policies were established to address insurgent issues and eventually achieve the people's primary goal of exercising the right to self-governance. Several peace agreements were forged between the Philippine government

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<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro" (Manila/Brussels, April 14, 2020), 1, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/306-southern-philippines-tackling-clan-politics-bangsamoro>.

and the secessionist groups but, despite all efforts to establish pacts against violence, peace in Mindanao has never been fully realized.

Peter Kruezer has emphasized the importance of clans and clan leaders. The Muslims in Southern Mindanao traditionally established policies through leaders of political clans, who have a near monopoly of power over certain territories. Clans persistently use their members as a resource in elections to achieve a degree of victory for politicians who aspire to positions at the national level. In return, the national level politicians integrate the clan leaders into their patronage networks.<sup>2</sup> This helps secure financial support for the clan to fortify their existence and safeguard their rule.

An intensified Moro rebellion in the Philippines started in 1968 during the execution of the Jabidah Massacre, a clandestine military operation that killed 28 of the 64 Muslim recruits by government forces.<sup>3</sup> This angered Muslim leaders, leading to the creation of the Muslim Independence Movement. The massacre ignited the already emerging resistance stemming from the continuous oppression suffered by the Muslim population, including the loss of ancestral lands and a massive influx of Christians into their traditional homeland. In 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was organized to establish a separate Moro nation-state in the Southern Philippines.<sup>4</sup> In 1978, an MNLF breakaway movement was formed, eventually becoming the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).<sup>5</sup> Other separatist and terrorist movements were organized in the Philippines, including the Abu Sayyaf Group, Misuari Breakaway Group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and Maute Group. This decades-old struggle of the Moro rebels led to numerous clashes against government troops and stagnated development of the region.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kreuzer, "Political Clans and Violence in The Southern Philippines," *Front Matter* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peace Research Institute, 2005), 17, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep14517.1>.

<sup>3</sup> Rommel Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror | National, Regional, and Global Challenges in the Post-9/11 World*, 1st ed. (Boca Raton, FL: Auerbach Publications, 2018), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Banlaoi, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Banlaoi, 51.

In order to resolve the protracted conflict, the Philippine government initiated various ceasefires and peace agreements. The concept of granting autonomy to Muslim provinces in response to the clamor of the MNLF started in 1976 with the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. This agreement defined the autonomous administrative division of Muslims in Mindanao.<sup>6</sup> However, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was not established until 1996 and largely benefitted the MNLF. On the other hand, the MILF, led by a former MNLF member, remained persistent in its desire for a separate Islamic state in Mindanao. To address their grievances, a Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was forged, but the agreement was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. In 2012, a new framework agreement was initiated between the GPH and the MILF to establish the law that would create a new autonomous region. However, the final promulgation of said law was put on hold due to a hostile confrontation between the MILF and government troops, which resulted in the death of 44 Philippine National Police Special Action Force members in 2015.<sup>7</sup> Their mission was to capture a Malaysian terrorist, allegedly at that time under the protection of the MILF breakaway group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

This thesis focuses on the impact of clan politics on the success or failure of negotiations for Bangsamoro self-determination. The core of the thesis is premised on the critical role of clan politics vis-à-vis the stability or instability of the territory granted autonomy. The topics presented in the discussions will address sequential events to describe the initiatives undertaken to resolve the issues related to the Muslim struggles in the Southern Philippines.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review begins with an analysis of research on clans, clan politics, and the internal dynamics that enable them to persist over time. The review then examines how clan politics affect the trajectory of regimes and the performance of states.

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<sup>6</sup> Banlaoi, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Franco, "The Philippines: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front—A Pragmatic Power Structure," in *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition*, ed. Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2016), 176.

Furthermore, it considers the various aspects of clan competition and conflict for power and resources that may stabilize or destabilize a state.

## 1. Definition of Clan and Clan Politics

Several studies define a clan. Kathleen Collins defines a clan as “an informal organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin-based bonds.”<sup>8</sup> The author emphasizes the emotional connection of its members due to kinship, which becomes their basis for identity. Accordingly, the relations of the clan members are “both vertical and horizontal, linking elites and non-elites, and they reflect both actual blood ties and fictive kinship.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Florence Ssereo identifies clans more specifically as extended families.<sup>10</sup> According to this author, genealogy is the primary basis of clan origins and locates clans through their boundaries or territories. In comparison, Beatriz Francia refers to clans as kin-based political factions with pronounced dynastic tendencies.<sup>11</sup>

A clan network extends from actual blood ties to fictive kinship. It is a composition of both the elite and non-elite members connected through friendships or marriage.<sup>12</sup> Elites are usually the wealthy members who are expected to provide the leadership, welfare support, dispute resolution, and security of the clan. On the other hand, the non-elites are the poorer ones expected to support the elites with their unconditional loyalty. Collins calls this behavior kin-based patronage, where clan elites never abandon the non-elites.<sup>13</sup> The clan’s leadership is traditionally legitimized, with clan members bound by informal rules

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<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics* 56, no. 2 (January 2004): 231, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/wp.2004.0009>.

<sup>9</sup> Collins, 231.

<sup>10</sup> Florence Ssereo, “Clanpolitics, Clan-Democracy and Conflict Regulation in Africa: The Experience of Somalia,” *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 2, no. 3–4 (March 2003): 25–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14718800308405142>.

<sup>11</sup> Beatriz Romualdez Francia, *Imelda and the Clans: A Story of the Philippines*, 2nd ed. (Metro Manila, Philippines: Solar Pub Corporation, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 231.

<sup>13</sup> Collins, 244.

that persist through time. Clan leaders decide for the whole clan. According to Collins, such rules are not democratic and “may undermine formal civil and political liberties.”<sup>14</sup>

Some studies also show that clan networks are connected through ethnicity. Collins argue that clans are intra-ethnic and usually related by genealogies.<sup>15</sup> In a study in the Southern Philippines, the International Crisis Group observed the ethnic divide of Muslims per territory, with each led by a clan elite of a specific regional ethnicity.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the Maranao, Tausug, and Maguindanaon are the dominant ethnic groups in the provinces of Lanao, Sulu, and Maguindanao respectively. These provinces are part of the BARMM, which have been subjected to decades of internal and external conflicts. In a study on the same region, Tristan Mabry argues that ethnicity, when it is related to clan, plays a major role in Moro conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that clan ties, loyalties and ethnicities are variables that should be considered to understand the evolution of conflicts.

Clans persist due to the informal institutions that they create. Informal institutions are “the unwritten rules, norms, and conventions that are rooted in shared expectations and reinforced by social sanctions.”<sup>18</sup> Collins argues that the clan structure relies on these informal institutions within the clans.<sup>19</sup> This is especially true when a state or regime is weak. Clan elites need the support from clan members to maintain their status; in turn, members expect the elites to be patrons in providing for their survival. Similarly, Francisco Lara Jr. and Phil Champain use the term informal economy, which provides clans with security during uncertain times.<sup>20</sup> Also, Alfred McCoy relates this system to the Philippine context, as powerful families provide for the survival of their members when the state is

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<sup>14</sup> Collins, 245.

<sup>15</sup> Kathleen Collins, “The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia,” *Comparative Politics* 35, no. 2 (2003): 174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4150150>.

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro,” 17.

<sup>17</sup> Tristan James Mabry, *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism*, 1st Ed (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 179, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/38225>.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 231.

<sup>19</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics.”

<sup>20</sup> Francisco Jr. Lara and Phil Champain, “Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao: Revisiting the Dynamics of Conflict and Exclusion” (London: International Alert, June 2009), <https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Philippines-Mindanao-Inclusive-Peace-EN-2009.pdf>.

unstable.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, McCoy elaborates on survival, describing how families protect each other through thick and thin. These internal dynamics of a clan strengthen its identity bonds, as Collins posits.<sup>22</sup> However, Lara Jr. and Champain suggest that such a support system may lead to conflict, undermining the state because clans will continuously compete for political influence and resources.<sup>23</sup>

Competition for power, resources, and boundaries characterizes clan politics, as Afyari Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise found in their study of clans in Somalia.<sup>24</sup> Clans compete with other clans for power to gain access to resources. Collins describes such competition as clan politics, i.e., “the politics of informal competition and deal-making between clans in pursuit of clan interests.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Kreuzer argues that politics concerning clans is a competition between elites of rival clans.<sup>26</sup> Power can be classified as a political position for political influence, as suggested by David Karienyé and Osman Warfa.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, resources mean the control of income and sustenance, as Ibrahim Farah and his co-authors posit.<sup>28</sup> Power and resources go hand-in-hand and are vital for the sustainment of a clan. According to Collins, clan elites vie for the power of a state to gain access to resources for its patronage network with the non-clan elites.<sup>29</sup> Kreuzer posits that clans tend to penetrate formal institutions to satisfy the needs of their

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<sup>21</sup> Alfred McCoy, ed., *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2009), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 233.

<sup>23</sup> Lara and Champain, “Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao: Revisiting the Dynamics of Conflict and Exclusion,” 11.

<sup>24</sup> Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise, “The Somali Conflict: Root Causes, Obstacles, and Peace-Building Strategies,” *African Security Review* 15, no. 1 (January 2006): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2006.9627386>.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 224.

<sup>26</sup> Kreuzer, “Political Clans and Violence in The Southern Philippines.”

<sup>27</sup> David Karienyé and Osman Warfa, “Dynamics of Clan Based Conflicts in Wajir County, Kenya,” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 (2020): 692–702.

<sup>28</sup> Ibrahim Farah, Abdirashid Hussein, and Jeremy Lind, “Deegaan, Politics and War in Somalia,” in *Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa’s Conflicts* (South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2002), 321–56.

<sup>29</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 257.

own clan.<sup>30</sup> Also, Miller argues that clans are the functional structures that protect individuals, assert claims to resources and respect, and establish norms to prevent lawlessness.<sup>31</sup> Once the balance among clans and patronage power is disrupted, conflict will arise. Collins found in her study of Central Asian clans that clan violence is often very severe and deeply ingrained because it is motivated by individuals who see these conflicts as personal and their unforgiving stance makes peaceful resolution difficult to achieve.<sup>32</sup>

It is argued that, in the Southern Philippines, clan politics is one of the drivers of conflict. With this competition and conflict, Collins showed that clan actions can affect the trajectories of regimes. Without intervention, clan politics can be a perpetual source of instability.

## **2. Role of Clan Politics**

Studies show that clan politics can either stabilize or destabilize a regime. Collins, in her study on the transitions of regimes from authoritarian to democratic during the post-Soviet era, shows that cooperation among clans will lead to stabilization of the regime while competition and conflict cause its destabilization.<sup>33</sup> This type of competition generally results in violence, which destabilizes the regime. Moreover, “increasing clan tensions have political leaders worrying about more civil disturbance.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, violence brought about by clan politics was seen in the study by Segun Joshua on Ebiraland, Somalia.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, rival clan violence can be attributed to political power competition, clan leadership, and the battle for supremacy among clans. Apart from these examples, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime identified the

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<sup>30</sup> Kreuzer, “Political Clans and Violence in The Southern Philippines,” 11.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Rood, “Interlocking Autonomy: Manila and Muslim Mindanao,” in *Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 256–77.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, “The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia,” 187.

<sup>33</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics.”

<sup>34</sup> Collins, 224.

<sup>35</sup> Segun Joshua, “Clan Politics and Violent Conflict in Nigeria: The Ebira Tao Experience,” *African Identities* 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2017.1381833>.

competition for the control of territory as one of the cause of conflicts.<sup>36</sup> Also, Miller argues that persistent conflict among clans is due to land disputes.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Georgi Engelbrecht, in his study of the autonomous region of the Southern Philippines, argues that weak governance or weak states cannot counteract kinship ties because they cannot provide for the clans in terms of incentives or resources.<sup>38</sup>

**a. Elections**

The battle for political positions is a critical component of clan politics. In Somaliland, a study by Guleid Ahmed Jama shows that political parties are actually forums for political clans.<sup>39</sup> The study of Collins on Central Asia conveys that political leaders in national and regional government are composed of clan elites.<sup>40</sup> In a similar study by Rommel Banlaoi, clans and traditional families dominate Philippine politics.<sup>41</sup> For example, a study by Ssereo found that most politicians belong to a specific clan.<sup>42</sup> The studies substantiate the existence of clan politics during elections, as clan elites compete against rival clans. Elections are a showcase of competing interests of leaders from clans and other elites. During elections, the clan patronage network and the loyalty of its members can bring in votes. Note that Ssereo argues that clan politics are a challenge to democratic principles.<sup>43</sup> Election votes are based on clan allegiance and not on the credibility and platform of the candidates. Once elected, clan elites establish political dynasties for their sustained hold on power. Ronald Mendoza defines political dynasties as

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<sup>36</sup> “Insecurity in Mindanao: Conflict and State-Sponsored Violence,” Global Initiative, February 2020, 4, [https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Mindanao.PB\\_10.02.webv1-1.pdf](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Mindanao.PB_10.02.webv1-1.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Michelle Ann Miller, ed., *Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Georgi Engelbrecht, “Violence in Southern Philippines Highlights Resilience of Militant Networks,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/violence-in-southern-philippines-highlights-resilience-of-militant-networks/>.

<sup>39</sup> Guleid Ahmed Jama, “Somaliland: Is Clan-Based Politics Inevitable?” Center for Policy Analysis (2019), 2, <https://cpahorn.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Is-clan-based-politics-in-inevitable.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics.”

<sup>41</sup> Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ssereo, “Clanpolitics, Clan-Democracy and Conflict Regulation in Africa.”

<sup>43</sup> Ssereo, 25.

“members of the same family occupying elected positions,” either in sequence or simultaneously across different positions.<sup>44</sup> In the Philippines, Abuza and Lischin suggest that political dynasties are growing.<sup>45</sup> Dynasties usually belong to a clan and some of the most powerful clan political dynasties are found within the BARMM.

**b. *Clan Feuds***

With clans competing for power, influence and resources for survival, conflicts are a normal occurrence. The report from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime states that clan feuds (known in the Philippines by the local term *Rido*) are caused by competition for governance and control of territory.<sup>46</sup> Clan feuds, one of the primary conflicts in the Southern Philippines, are a product of the quest for power dominance, as Miller posits.<sup>47</sup> Elections are won through extra-legal means and political violence is employed by rival clans to gain undue advantage. Apart from election related violence, clan feuds occur due to perceived injustices and other animosities between clans, as Sian Herbert suggests.<sup>48</sup> More specifically, he cited other causes of conflict, such as land disputes, business deals, marriages, and personal grudges. These feuds generate a cycle of encounters and retaliations between clans, which can undermine government services or may affect the impartiality of the government in its actions on diffusing the conflict.

**c. *Contribution of Clan Politics to the Internal Problems of a State***

A number of researchers emphasize that clan politics exacerbate the internal security problems of a state. Anna Louise Strachan, in her study of conflict in the Southern

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<sup>44</sup> Ronald U. Mendoza et al., “Political Dynasties and Poverty: Measurement and Evidence of Linkages in the Philippines,” *Oxford Development Studies* 44, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1169264>.

<sup>45</sup> Zachary Abuza and Luke Lischin, “The Challenges Facing the Philippines’ Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year” United States Institute of Peace, June 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/06/>.

<sup>46</sup> “Insecurity in Mindanao,” 3.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia*.

<sup>48</sup> Siân Herbert, “Conflict Analysis of the Philippines” (Birmingham, UK: GSRDC, University of Birmingham, July 29, 2019), 16, <https://gsdrc.org/publications/conflict-analysis-of-the-philippines/>.

Philippines, argues that the conflict is multi-faceted, involving different insurgents, terrorists, and clans.<sup>49</sup> According to Acram Latiph, clans employ the “four Gs”—guns, goons, gold, and genealogy—to accumulate power and resources.<sup>50</sup> McCoy posits that political strongmen become warlords who are tolerated by the national government.<sup>51</sup> The administration informally allows clan elites to provide for their own security, as Banlaoi argues.<sup>52</sup> For these reasons, powerful political clans in the Philippines enlist their own private armies. This was presented in a study by Jandrew Taala who found that private armies continued to persist despite various efforts of the Philippine government to eliminate them.<sup>53</sup> A bigger problem in this security setting is the simultaneous existence of other forms of conflict, such as terrorism, also due to the kinship ties of members. Banlaoi argues that the Abu Sayyaf Group sustains its operations due to support from certain clans.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the Maute Group, a pro-ISIS cell from the Southern Philippines, also emanated from a clan.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Georgi Engelbrecht’s study reveals that the Bangsamoro secessionist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) were supported by clans.<sup>56</sup> Hence, the internal security problem in the Southern Philippines has become more complex due to the presence of clans.

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Louise Strachan, “Conflict Analysis of Muslim Mindanao” (Birmingham, UK: GSRDC, University of Birmingham, December 2015), 4, <http://www.gsrdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ConflictAnalysisARMM.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Acram Latiph, “Lanao Del Sur: Gold, Goons, Guns, and Genealogy,” in *Electoral Dynamics in the Philippines: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019), 309–31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv136c5vg>.

<sup>51</sup> McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror*, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Jandrew Taala, “Persistence of Private Armies in the Philippines” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 33, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/61281>.

<sup>54</sup> Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> “Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy After the Battle for Marawi,” International Crisis Group, July 17, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/philippines-addressing-islamist-militancy-after-battle-marawi>.

<sup>56</sup> Georgi Engelbrecht, “The Logics of Insurgency in the Bangsamoro,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32, no. 6 (August 18, 2021): 887–912, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1940424>.

### **3. Summary**

The literature shows how clans and clan politics affect the internal dynamics of a country by affecting the trajectories of transitional regimes and the stability of a state. Clans' quests for power and influence are evident in elections, clan feuds, and contributions to insurgents. This problem continues to persist and presents a challenge to the BARMM.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

There are several ways clan politics may influence the successful or failed implementation of the BARMM, an entity which could promote harmony among the Muslims in Mindanao. In order to limit the scope of this thesis, it only focusses on two hypotheses. First, it delves into the role of clan politics during the negotiations leading to the creation of the BARMM. Second, it explores the critical role of clan politics in the implementation of the BARMM.

The first hypothesis posits that the negotiations leading to the successful *creation* of the BARMM were supported by addressing the challenges of clan politics. There were several attempts in the past to establish a compromise and provide the Muslim population with regional autonomy. This has led to countless negotiations, which yielded the creation of the ARMM and, subsequently, the BARMM.

The second hypothesis posits that clan politics is affecting the *implementation* of the BARMM. The BARMM was created to solve the decades-old Muslim struggle for self-determination and this struggle has been exacerbated by the presence of clans. In their quest for power and resources, clans have been active in the political arena and even in the armed violence in the region. It is hypothesized that clans continue to affect the politics of the Southern Philippines today, though it is not yet determined whether their actions will support or weaken the implementation of the BARMM.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis uses a qualitative method to test the hypotheses. It employs a holistic account of events to explore the interacting multiple factors related to understanding the relation of clan politics in implementing the BARMM. Initially, this thesis reviews

historical narratives of the origins of clans and clan politics from the Philippine pre-colonial period to the present. This study also examines the role of clans and clan politics during the peace negotiations of the ARMM and eventually the BARMM. In the analysis, this study uses primary sources, such as the text of the laws and policies implementing peace agreements, as well as scholarly journal articles, academic books, news media accounts, and reports by government and non-governmental organizations.

## II. HISTORY OF CLANS AND CLAN POLITICS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

Clans in the Southern Philippines have a long and contentious history from the pre-colonial to post-colonial period. Muslim traders started establishing local settlements in the southern part of the Philippines beginning in the 14th century.<sup>57</sup> This region was later named Mindanao and became home to most Filipino Muslims. When Spanish colonial forces came in 1578 to subjugate the Philippine Islands, the Muslim sultanates and ethnic tribes resisted, which led to three centuries of conflict.<sup>58</sup> After the Philippines was ceded to the United States (U.S.), political control, Christian migration, and education programs were initiated to integrate Muslims and Christians. By the 20th century, the U.S. relinquished its colonial rule by establishing the new Philippine Republic.

### A. PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD (1300 – 1565)

As early as the 14th century, extended kinships created dynasties in Mindanao, demarcating the sultanates of Sulu and Cotabato. Muslim seafaring traders established Islamic institutions in the south by settling alliances with the locals through marriage and kinship ties.<sup>59</sup> The Sulu Sultanate, located in areas of the Zamboanga Peninsula, was composed of ethnolinguistic groups known as the Tausug, the Sama, and the Yakan.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, the Cotabato Sultanate, established in the southwest quadrant of Mindanao, was inhabited mainly by Maguindanaoans and the Maranaos.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 1999), 68.

<sup>58</sup> F. Delor Angeles, “The Moro Wars,” in *The Muslim Filipinos Their History, Society, and Contemporary Problems*, ed. Peter G Gowing and Robert D. McAmis (Manila, Philippines: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 27.

<sup>59</sup> Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 68.

<sup>60</sup> Ma. Elizabeth J. Macapagal, Cristina J. Montiel, and Jose Jowel P. Canuday, “The Unifying and Divisive Effects of Social Identities: Religious and Ethnopolitical Identities Among Mindanao Muslims in the Philippines,” *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 12 (January 1, 2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/prp.2018.16>.

<sup>61</sup> James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2007).

A sacred belief in aristocratic ascendancy defined the leadership of the sultanates.<sup>62</sup> It was based on an ancient Muslim ruling order wherein the entitlement to rule a Muslim polity is based on genealogy and descendancy from the great Prophet Muhammad. Lineage and genealogy are significant to Muslim families because of their commensurate affirmation of the rank of honor and pride for the whole clan, or “*maratabat*.”<sup>63</sup> A book called “*tarsila*” or “*salsila*” bears the genealogical transcriptions of Muslim lineage as the basis for the legitimacy of a Muslim leader to the ruling elite.<sup>64</sup> Ranks, including aristocrats, commoners, and slaves, categorized these traditional Muslim societies.<sup>65</sup> The aristocrats known as Sultans, Datus, or Rajahs represent the apex of the ruling elites.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from traditional sanctified inequality, a sense of community characterized the Muslim polity. The emergence of Islam in the Southern Philippines introduced among Filipino Muslims the degree of belongingness to a broader community with a deeply-rooted cultural identity known as “Morohood.”<sup>67</sup> It is an ideology ingrained among Muslims in the consciousness of being part of the broader Muslim population in other parts of the country.<sup>68</sup>

The Tausug, a unique group of Muslims, was one of the dominant ethnolinguistic groups under the Sulu Sultanate. Its communal belief also follows the lineage system yet does not fully embrace the concept of ancestral lines in assuming ascendancy.<sup>69</sup> Since the focal point of Tausug culture is law, politics, and warfare, headship sometimes is adjusted to follow achievement-based governance. A *de facto* power is legitimized by a title bestowed

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremy Beckett, “The Defiant and The Compliant: The Datus of Magindanao Under Colonial Rule,” *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations* (1982), 396–97.

<sup>64</sup> Najeeb M. Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905), 4:11, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41770/41770-h/41770-h.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Laura L Junker, *Raiding, Trading, and Feasting: The Political Economy of Philippine Chiefdoms* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 51.

<sup>67</sup> McKenna, 45.

<sup>68</sup> McKenna.

<sup>69</sup> Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt4cg7nk>.

upon a ruling sultan regardless of ancestry once he accumulates followers and political kinship.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, the Maguindanao society under the Sultanate of Cotabato exemplifies a Muslim polity that emphasizes nobility and power. This Muslim society bestows upon the leader the entitlement and political power to rule on account of his aristocratic standing. Unlike the Tausugs, Maguindanoans value the significance of aristocracy over meritocracy.<sup>71</sup> The focus of the political and economic organization is the legitimacy and structure of the hierarchical system based on the lineage headship or “chiefdoms.”

The early settlers in Maguindanao that charted the history of clans in the Cotabato Sultanate were the seafaring people led by Sarip Kabungsuwan, who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. He escaped from Portuguese colonial forces during the seizure of Melaka in the early 1500s.<sup>72</sup> Kabungsuwan established his realm in Maguindanao, conquered neighboring tribes, and converted them to Islam. The event created the dynasty, and tribal chiefs were vested with the title of “datu,” meaning ruler.<sup>73</sup> Kabungsuwan retained his title of “Sarip” to represent the noble Muslim Arab from Johore. He married the daughters of his high-born converts and established dynastic bloodlines of Muslim descent.<sup>74</sup> The Maranao datus also claim royal lineage from Sarip Kabungsuwan.

## **B. SPANISH COLONIZATION (1565 – 1898)**

Resistance to Christianization characterized the Spanish colonization period. The ideals of Morohood united the Moros to counter Spanish efforts to subjugate and convert the Muslims in Mindanao.<sup>75</sup> Filipino Muslims forged informal military alliances to fight against

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<sup>70</sup> Tomas Kiefer, “Institutionalized Friendship and Warfare Among the Tausug of Jolo,” in *The Muslim Filipinos* (Manila, Philippines: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 115.

<sup>71</sup> Beckett, “The Defiant and The Compliant,” 391–414.

<sup>72</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 49.

<sup>73</sup> Beckett, “The Defiant and The Compliant,” 396–97.

<sup>74</sup> Beckett.

<sup>75</sup> Kathleen M Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in The Philippines: Faith in a Revolution* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

the Spaniards. During those times, the most potent force was the alliance system led by Sultan Qudrat, a descendant of Sarip Kabungsuwan.<sup>76</sup> His armed group became the central power, merging the forces of Maguindanaoans, Maranaos, and the tribes in Sulu. At the height of Spanish offensives from the 16th to 19th century, Muslim sultanates in the Southern Philippines were forced to suppress Islamic practices and teachings.<sup>77</sup> However, the Spaniards were short of resources to defeat the fierce resistance of the Muslims decisively.<sup>78</sup>

The “Moro Wars” is the general term given to the conflicts between Muslim sultanates and Spanish colonizers from 1578 to 1898.<sup>79</sup> The term “Moro” was used as a pejorative name for all Muslims in Southern Philippines.<sup>80</sup> The Spanish colonizers referred to Filipino Muslims as “Moors” because of the religion that associates them with the Muslim Moors who conquered the Iberian Peninsula. Muslim nationalists in the Philippines adopted “Moro” (or *Moor*) to designate their shared identity among the various Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the country.<sup>81</sup> Muslim defiance of religious conversion resulted in the armed collisions of the Moro Wars between Muslim polities and the Spanish colonial forces, which lasted three hundred years.<sup>82</sup>

Although conflicts between Muslims and Spanish forces were active in some parts of Mindanao, Muslim clans were simultaneously expanding their economic and political strength in other areas.<sup>83</sup> The military and economic pressure caused by the wars compelled Sultanates to align with Spanish military forces to gain favor and prevent their fortunes from

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<sup>76</sup> Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos 1899–1920* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines System, 1977).

<sup>77</sup> Gowing.

<sup>78</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, “Islam and Muslims in the Southern Territories of the Philippine Islands During the American Colonial Period (1898 to 1946),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (September 1998): 341.

<sup>79</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*.

<sup>80</sup> Michael C. Hawkins, *Making Moros: Imperial Historicism and American Military Rule in the Philippines’ Muslim South* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 80.

<sup>82</sup> Thayil J.S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>83</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*.

dwindling. From 1605 to 1735, Spaniards forged treaties with the Sultanates of the region, acknowledging the Sultans as leaders.<sup>84</sup> During those times, evidence of clan politics was concretized by the dominance of armed power, control over slave labor, and monopoly of trade products.<sup>85</sup> The clans consolidated power by constantly accumulating followers, engaging in marriage alliances, maintaining friendly relations with stronger datus, and paying tribute to Spanish forces.<sup>86</sup> Other clans utilized force to accumulate resources by engaging in conflicts with weaker clans to capture enslaved people and seize products.<sup>87</sup>

### **C. AMERICAN COLONIZATION PERIOD (1898-1942 / 1945–1946)**

The Spanish colonizers ceded the Philippine Islands to the United States in December 1898 under the Treaty of Paris.<sup>88</sup> The Sultanate of Sulu was unaware of the inclusion of the Mindanao and Sulu territories in the ceded colony to the U.S. The Americans knew that Muslims in Mindanao would not concede to any foreign colonization. Hence, the U.S. immediately implemented an indirect rule in early 1899.<sup>89</sup> The American colonial government signed a formal treaty, known as the Bates Agreement, with the Sultan of Sulu. It stated the provisions that American authority shall not interfere with the undertakings of the Sulu Sultanate on the aspects of religion, laws, and commerce.

Unknown to the Muslim Sultanate, the indirect governance advocated by Americans was only temporary. The Americans used indirect rule to neutralize the sultanates while concentrating forces against rebelling Philippine forces in the north. By 1905, the United States abruptly and unilaterally repealed the Bates Agreement. Accordingly, the colonial policy of indirect rule in Mindanao was shifted into direct rule, placing all local leaders under

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<sup>84</sup> McKenna, 78.

<sup>85</sup> Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo University Press, 2000).

<sup>86</sup> Laura L Junker, *Raiding, Trading, and Feasting*.

<sup>87</sup> Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, 48.

<sup>88</sup> Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "Framework for Autonomy in Southeast Asia's Plural Societies," Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University (2001), 4.

<sup>89</sup> Michael C. Hawkins, *Making Moros: Imperial Historicism and American Military Rule in the Philippines' Muslim South* (Chicago, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 9.

the direct supervision of a district governor.<sup>90</sup> The district governor, General John Pershing, recommended to the central government of Manila the appointment of Muslim leaders to positions such as deputy district governor as a reward for loyalty to American rule and for advocating peace in the region.<sup>91</sup>

The American period transformed the traditional Muslim leaders into modern-day political leaders. The modern democratic culture afforded avenues for eligible Muslim leaders to occupy positions within the organization regardless of any traditional nobility. The American colonial forces introduced a governance structure that appointed ceremonial offices for Muslim chiefs to assemblyman, municipal district president, or senator positions.

These positions were accorded to the Muslims to be intermediaries of the U.S. in implementing policies and enforcing compliance of Muslim people to colonial aims. The colonial order to disregard lineage leadership deprived original high-nobility Muslim leaders of the direct power to rule over their people and function only as nominal dignitaries. Furthermore, it created a generation of new colonial-era leaders. The political power acquired by these leaders afforded opportunities to exploit additional sources to expand their influence, amass wealth, and establish their names and family honor.<sup>92</sup>

By 1913, the U.S. initiated intra-state migration and education programs designed to integrate Muslims and Christians.<sup>93</sup> The mass migration of Christians to Mindanao has caused the “minoritization” of the Islamized population and the subsequent loss of what was then known as the exclusive Muslim homeland.<sup>94</sup> Prominent Moro elites raised issues with the central government regarding the policy, particularly on acquiring Muslim land titles.<sup>95</sup> By the end of the American colonial period, the population of non-Muslims grew

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<sup>90</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 91.

<sup>91</sup> Abinales, *Making Mindanao*.

<sup>92</sup> Beckett, “The Defiant and The Compliant.”

<sup>93</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> Ferrer, “Framework for Autonomy in Southeast Asia’s Plural Societies,” 5.

<sup>95</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 117.

exponentially. In 1948, the non-Muslim population in Cotabato increased to 284,507, compared to original Muslim inhabitants at 155,162.<sup>96</sup>

Apart from the migration program, the U.S. instituted Western educational programs for Muslims.<sup>97</sup> American colonial agents believed that education could provide the means to improve conditions in Muslim communities needed by the new Philippine nation.<sup>98</sup> During the American colonial period, one of the most prominent Muslim educators was Edward Kuder, who served as superintendent of schools for seventeen years in three provinces of Mindanao. He led Muslim students toward a modern democratic culture that blended more harmoniously with Christian Filipinos.<sup>99</sup> One of his prodigies was Salipada Pendatun, son of a sultan, who later became one of the most influential political clan leaders in the post-colonial era.<sup>100</sup>

Electoral politics was introduced by the Americans from the local to the national level and eventually allowed Muslims to vote. Local elections in other parts of the country started in 1901. At the national level, legislative and presidential elections started in 1907 and 1935, respectively.<sup>101</sup> The tiered election scheme established by the Americans starting at the local to national level afforded opportunities to local politicians' entrenchment to local government positions. The position increased local politicians' influence on the electorate and wielded the delivery of votes during presidential elections. In return, politicians at the national level repaid political patronage to local politicians, which compromised the effectiveness of the central government. With Christian politicians already ahead in the country's political arena, the policies made by the central government disadvantaged Muslims.

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<sup>96</sup> Eric Gutierrez and Saturnino Jr. Borras, *The Moro Conflict: Landlessness and Misdirected State Policies* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004), 14.

<sup>97</sup> Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, "Conflict in the Southern Philippines," 2005.

<sup>98</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*.

<sup>99</sup> Edward M. Kuder, "The Moros in the Philippines," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1945): 119–26.

<sup>100</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*, 110.

<sup>101</sup> McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 12.

#### **D. JAPANESE COLONIZATION PERIOD (1942-1945)**

The formation of private armies was the most significant consequence of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. The Muslims fought together with the Americans and Christians against the Japanese forces. The Americans provided arms and ammunition throughout the war.<sup>102</sup> Effective collaboration of Muslims with the entire anti-Japanese armed forces in Mindanao led to the defeat of the Japanese occupation forces.<sup>103</sup> Pendatun, a known Muslim elite, led one of the Mindanao guerilla units and was appointed governor of Cotabato in 1945 as a token for his heroic acts during the war.

Loose firearms proliferated after the conquest of Japanese forces because guerilla forces did not return the weapons and ammunition issued by the Americans during the war.<sup>104</sup> After the war, the weakening of central authority resulted in the rise of powerful clans and political elites, which inadvertently caused the upsurge of violence in the provinces.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, local politicians, especially in Mindanao, started to gain power by employing private armies to resolve disputes and protect their turf from inter-clan feuds.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, as Japanese forces were fended off from their encampments, the Muslims reclaimed some of the lands they lost due to Christian migration.<sup>107</sup>

#### **E. POST-COLONIZATION PERIOD (1946–1965)**

In July 1946, the war-torn Philippines formally received independence from U.S. colonial rule after almost four decades. This significantly altered both the country's local and provincial political landscape. The governance from American authorities was passed onto the Republic, opening opportunities for local leaders to govern the state. The democratic

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<sup>102</sup> McCoy, 247.

<sup>103</sup> Max L. Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago: Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic Intelligence Research, National Defense Intelligence College, 2007).

<sup>104</sup> Beckett, "The Defiant and The Compliant," 406.

<sup>105</sup> McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 169.

<sup>106</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review*, no. 169 (May 1, 1988): 3–31.

<sup>107</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*.

political arena ushered in the expansion of the electorates and the formation of political parties.

Party politics was vibrant during the post-independence period in the Muslim community. Pendatun's outstanding bravery earned accolades from the central government. He was elected senator in 1946, and his influence was vital in the appointment of his brother-in-law, Datu Udtug Matalam, as governor of Cotabato.<sup>108</sup> As President Quirino was elected president in 1949, Pendatun lost his senate seat, and his rival, Datu Duma Sinsuat, replaced Datu Udtug as governor of Cotabato.<sup>109</sup>

Dynastic ruling was already common during the period. The Sinsuats were holders of mayoral and congressional seats in Cotabato City. In 1955, the central government accorded Muslims full voting rights. Datu Udtug was elected governor of the province and served four consecutive terms.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Pendatun was elected as congressman in 1957.<sup>111</sup> At this point, Pendatun already learned the lessons of his political defeat in 1949. His political strategy was to align himself with the dominant political party and continually coalesce with the presidential party.

The Commonwealth Administration focused primarily on the nation's economic development. The post-colonial government marked all unregistered lands as government-owned or military reservations.<sup>112</sup> The defined lands offered a promising solution and resettlement terms to armed rebels from Central Luzon seeking agrarian reforms in the 1950s.<sup>113</sup> Christian migration to Mindanao also accelerated during this post-war period due to the favorable opportunities related to land reform programs in the vast farmlands of Mindanao. The program benefited the new Christian settlers in Mindanao but fell short of provisioning representation of the Muslim population.

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<sup>108</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 126.

<sup>109</sup> McKenna, 127.

<sup>110</sup> McKenna, 128.

<sup>111</sup> McKenna, 127.

<sup>112</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*.

<sup>113</sup> Gutierrez and Borras, *The Moro Conflict*, 8.

The Muslims neither applied for acquisition of new lands nor filed for entitlements of their current dwelling due to high fees or tax requirements and unfamiliarity with the process.<sup>114</sup> By 1970, the ratio of non-Muslims in the region compared to Muslims rose from 0.74 in 1918 to 2.21 (see Table 1).<sup>115</sup> Land rights became the primary cause of the rising resentments among Muslims against Christian homesteaders.

Table 1. Population Trends in Muslim Areas of the Philippines (1918-1970)<sup>116</sup>

<i>Population</i>	<i>Year</i>				
	<i>1918</i>	<i>1939</i>	<i>1948</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1970</i>
Muslim population of the Philippines (%)	4.29	4.23	4.11	4.86	4.32
			Cotabato		
Muslims	110,926	162,996	155,162	356,460	424,577
Non-Muslims	61,052	135,939	284,507	672,659	711,430
Ratio	0.55	0.83	1.83	1.89	1.68
			Lanao		
Muslims	83,319	162,632	237,215	412,260	497,122
Non-Muslims	8,140	80,805	106,703	236,670	308,328
Ratio	0.10	0.50	0.45	0.57	0.62
			Sulu		
Muslims	168,629	230,553	226,883	310,926	401,984
Non-Muslims	4,147	16,584	1,393	15,972	23,633
Ratio	0.03	0.07	0.01	0.05	0.06
			Zamboanga		
Muslims	44,789	92,028	133,348	194,444	191,527
Non-Muslims	102,544	263,956	288,593	829,389	1,251,870
Ratio	2.29	2.87	2.16	4.27	6.54

The massive migration affected the political landscape of Mindanao. In 1951, Congressman Pendatun submitted a bill for the division of Cotabato Province into two, North Cotabato and South Cotabato. Its purpose was to provide demarcated areas for Christians and Muslims. Likewise, Pendatun was vital in the subdivision of Cotabato into 26

<sup>114</sup> Ralph Benjamin Thomas, "Muslim but Filipino: The Integration of Philippine Muslims 1917–1946" (PhD diss., United States, University of Pennsylvania, 1975), <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI7206242>.

<sup>115</sup> Gutierrez and Borrás, *The Moro Conflict*, 14.

<sup>116</sup> Mabry, *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism*, 182.

municipalities,<sup>117</sup> while Matalam provided political positions for the migrants and supported them with funds to run their respective governments. In return, Matalam earned the loyalty and support of the local leaders, increasing his capacity in terms of the votes he could deliver to the national-level politicians. The central government also saw the importance of the power of local politicians over his clans and kinship networks during elections.

Another aspect that entrenches local clan elites within their political realm is warlordism. The influx of weapons from World War II became a power source for local politicians.<sup>118</sup> Rather than returning the weapons, Muslims used them in defying policies being imposed by the government.<sup>119</sup> Local politicians used their authority in recruiting private militia.<sup>120</sup>

As a result of intra-state migration, the Muslim-Christian divide caused an alarming rise in political violence and banditry. In response, a program focused on education to integrate Muslims into the Christian population was created through the Commission on National Integration (CNI) in 1957.<sup>121</sup> The program was designed to integrate Muslims with the broader Filipino community and develop a shared identity as Muslim-Filipinos. Scholarship grants were offered to Muslim scholars to study in Manila universities and other Islamic educational institutions abroad. The program benefited children of ordinary Muslims and Muslim elites.

While the program was designed for positive outcomes, it has also negatively impacted some Muslim scholars. They saw the disparity between Muslims against the bigger

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<sup>117</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 130.

<sup>118</sup> McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 247.

<sup>119</sup> Max L. Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago: Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic Intelligence Research, National Defense Intelligence College, 2007).

<sup>120</sup> Jennifer Conroy Franco, *Elections and Democratization in the Philippines*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>121</sup> Cristina J. Montiel, Rudy B. Rodil, and Judith M. de Guzman, "The Moro Struggle and the Challenge to Peace Building in Mindanao, Southern Philippines," in *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Dan Landis and Rosita D. Albert, International and Cultural Psychology (Boston, MA: Springer U.S., 2012), 71–89, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0448-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0448-4_4).

Filipino community, where their people were marginalized, dispossessed, and abused.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the collusion of Muslim elites with the government was also evident.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

The behavior and representation of clan politics in the Philippines reflect the experiences and struggles of the clans, their political leaders, and kinship networks from the different colonial periods. Each period illustrated varying intentions of the colonial forces. The pre-colonial period has shown how clans thrived in the sultanates of Mindanao, Sulu and Cotabato. The clans, led by the elites, were connected through kinship and marriage bonds.

The Muslim way of life was disrupted during the colonization periods. During the Spanish period, Muslims resisted Christianization, forcing the Spaniards to establish alliances with the sultanates. Violence persisted in the early part of the American colonization. However, the Americans were able to end the conflict through the Bates Treaty and implemented programs such as migration and education to integrate Muslims to the Filipino community. Moreover, the Americans introduced elections that transformed the traditional *datus* into politicians.

Resistance against colonization and central government rule persisted throughout the Japanese colonization and the post-war periods. Muslims fought with Filipino Christians and American forces against the Japanese forces. The most significant impact of the period was the proliferation of small arms, which eventually led to the rise of clans and warlordism after the war. In the post-war era, the central government pursued the integration policy of the Americans, particularly through Christian migration. The program caused the dispossession of land and the minoritization of Muslims in their homeland and ignited several incidents of sectarian violence, which inadvertently ignited conflict in the contemporary period.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Montiel, Rodil, and de Guzman.

<sup>123</sup> Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: IQ Marin SDN BHD, 1984).

### **III. THE ROLE OF CLAN POLITICS (1965-2001)**

Clans, religious sects, and rebel groups directly affected the Philippine government's peace initiatives in the Southern Philippines. Mindanao's violence and significant events from 1965 to 2001 highlighted unresolved Moro problems. From Ferdinand Marcos to Joseph Estrada, successive Philippine presidents sought to initiate programs to achieve peace in Mindanao. However, each administration faced different agents of violence that stymied the peace process; clans and their political networks played important roles in the success and failure of various peace initiatives of the GPH in trying to resolve the conflict in its southern provinces.

The MNLF emerged as the most critical challenger to the GPH on its quest for a peaceful Mindanao. The intervention of significant actors represented by international Muslim leaders and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was vital in brokering peace between the GPH and the separatist group. The Tripoli Agreement, signed in 1976, shifted the issue from secession to autonomy, marking the fundamental framework of peace negotiations from Marcos to succeeding administrations. In the series of peace talks, each president pursued formal negotiations with the secessionist groups and simultaneously navigated informal patron-client relations with clan elites to achieve their goals.

#### **A. MARCOS ADMINISTRATION (1965-1986)**

##### **1. Persistence of Clans**

The presence of clans and political warlords in Mindanao was apparent during the administration of Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos employed an astute "unite and isolate" strategy among Muslim political elites, a technique highly similar to divide-and-rule by the Philippines' colonial masters.<sup>124</sup> He established political alliances with the clans of Dimaporo and Alonto-Lucman of Lanao provinces; the Sinsuat, Pendatun, Mastura and

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<sup>124</sup> Francisco Jr. Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States Political Legitimacy and Resurgent Conflict in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo De Manila Univ Press, 2014), 234.

Datumanong clans of Maguindanao; the Tulawie and Loong clans of Sulu; the Matba clan of Tawi-Tawi; and the Saliwali and Salapuddin clans of Basilan.<sup>125</sup> Part of his game plan included uniting kinship networks to align with his rule by bribing their leaders. On the other hand, he isolated opposing clans and armed groups by sabotaging revenue-sharing and conducting aggressive military assaults.<sup>126</sup>

Except for Ali Dimaporo, clan-based groups and Muslim elites were less eager to denounce the MNLF during the Marcos regime. In fact, these leaders at times used the MNLF secessionist agenda for their own self-serving interests. In the end, they lost Marcos' patronage to the disadvantage of their political future.<sup>127</sup> Dimaporo took advantage of the clans' passiveness and proved his capacity in achieving the president's aims. Marcos considered Dimaporo as his most powerful political ally and a formidable political machine in the south.<sup>128</sup> Dimaporo not only delivered votes to Marcos but also instigated violence under the guise of Muslim-Christian conflict, a strategy that fortified ethnic loyalties and exacerbated the sectarian divide.<sup>129</sup> He assisted Marcos in his effort to sow intrigue within the MNLF while scheming conspiracy with its international benefactors.<sup>130</sup> Marcos provided him with resources where Dimaporo amassed wealth and maintained a sizable private army, becoming the most powerful politician in the Southern Philippines by early 1980s.<sup>131</sup>

In Nov 1971, Dimaporo created a rift with his former ally, Governor Carmelo Quibranza, when the latter ran for reelection. Dimaporo supported his opponent, a Muslim

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<sup>125</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States*, 234.

<sup>126</sup> Marites D. Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Katipunan, Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Arts, 2000).

<sup>127</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States*.

<sup>128</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 217.

<sup>129</sup> Carter Bentley, "Mohamad Ali Dimaporo: A Modern Maranao Datu," in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, ed. Alfred McCoy (Place of publication: Publisher, 2009) 254, <https://uwpress.wisc.edu/books/4602.htm>.

<sup>130</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*.

<sup>131</sup> Bentley, "Mohamad Ali Dimaporo."

leader and the vice-governor of the province, Mamalig Umpa.<sup>132</sup> The simple political competition morphed into violent clan feuds between Quibranza and Dimaporo.<sup>133</sup> The massacre of 40 unarmed Muslims returning home after casting their votes to a special election set by the Commission on Elections in Tacub, Lanao del Norte, on November 22, 1971, punctuated the dispute.<sup>134</sup> The severity of the feuds compelled Marcos to intervene, and both Quibranza and Umpa agreed to withdraw from the electoral race.<sup>135</sup>

Under the rhetoric of Muslim-Christian conflict, inter-clan violence between religious sects ensued in the Cotabato region. A ferocious anti-Muslim, Feliciano Luces (a.k.a. Kumander “Toothpick”) defended poor farmers and Christian settlers along the Cotabato highlands whom Muslim outlaws exploited.<sup>136</sup> Kumander Toothpick’s depredation caught the attention of seven Christian leaders in Cotabato City: the mayors of Midsayap, Alamada, Libungan, Mlang, Tacurong, Tulunan and Pigkawayan, with PC Captain Manuel Tronco from Upi, Mindanao as the overall leader.<sup>137</sup> This led to the establishment of the vigilante group known as “Ilaga” (meaning “rat”).<sup>138</sup> To counter the Ilaga militant group, the Muslims organized a resistance group in Cotabato known as the “Blackshirts.”

The emergence of the armed bands steered several occurrences of sectarian violence all over the Cotabato, Lanao, and Maguindanao provinces. The Ilaga group continued to terrorize Muslims in Cotabato City, followed by a series of killings in other parts of Mindanao.<sup>139</sup> The Ampatuans, known as abusive to Christian settlers, suffered the most at the hands of the Christian band. Accordingly, the Ampatuan clan would sell

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<sup>132</sup> Bentley, 251.

<sup>133</sup> Bentley

<sup>134</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 142.

<sup>135</sup> Bentley, “Mohamad Ali Dimaporo.”

<sup>136</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 150.

<sup>137</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 136.

<sup>138</sup> Soliman M. Jr. Santos and Paz Verdades M. Santos, *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 1st ed. (Small Arms Survey, 2010), 70.

<sup>139</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*.

forested lands to Christian homesteaders and would shove them away by force once the land was cleared.<sup>140</sup> In June 1971, the Ilaga perpetrated a severe assault against the Muslims known as the Manili Massacre. Sixty-five Muslim men, women, and children were brutally killed while gathering inside a mosque in Carmen, North Cotabato.<sup>141</sup>

The incidents of Muslim killings caused a serious negative impact on Marcos' governance by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an international Muslim organization.<sup>142</sup> The OIC deemed the atrocities in Mindanao as a scheme to execute a genocidal state-instigated campaign to wipe out the Moros in the Philippines. By March 1972, the OIC officially expressed its serious concerns regarding the predicament of Muslims in the Philippines and offered mediation in the conflict.<sup>143</sup>

## **2. Clans and Muslim Secessionism**

The exposé of the alleged massacre of 28 Muslim recruits known as the Jaidah Massacre on March 1968 by AFP personnel stirred unrest among the Moros in Mindanao.<sup>144</sup> The government recruited these young Muslim trainees for "Operation Merdeka," a clandestine operation to regain Sabah from Malaysia and enforce the Philippines' territorial claims of the island.<sup>145</sup> The assault rekindled Muslims' quest for secessionism, thus resulting in the establishment of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) led by Datu Udtog Matalam, former governor of Cotabato province.<sup>146</sup> The MIM existed as a passive organization; however, the growing popularity of the movement under Datu Matalam raised significant concerns among Christian transmigrants in Mindanao, igniting the emergence of Christian militias.<sup>147</sup> To be rid of the suspicions among Christian

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<sup>140</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 153.

<sup>141</sup> Montiel, Rodil and de Guzman, "The Moro Struggle," 71–89.

<sup>142</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*.

<sup>143</sup> Santos and Santos, *Primed and Purposeful*.

<sup>144</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Oligarchic Rule Ethnocratic Tendencies and Armed Conflict," in *Post-Conflict Development in East Asia*, ed. Brendan Howe, 1st ed. (Singapore: Routledge, 2014), 3.

<sup>145</sup> Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror*, 49.

<sup>146</sup> Quimpo, "Oligarchic Rule Ethnocratic Tendencies and Armed Conflict," 3.

<sup>147</sup> Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago*.

settlers, Matalam changed the organization's name to Mindanao Independent Movement.<sup>148</sup>

Significantly, at the height of MIM's existence, powerful Muslim aristocrats and traditional clan leaders, such as Congressman Rashid Lucman and former Senator Salipada Pendatun and Matalam, facilitated an intensive military training of Muslim youths in Sabah Malaysia.<sup>149</sup> The pioneer batch of 90 Moro trainees included different ethnolinguistic groups: 64 members were Maranaos; 15 were Tausugs; and 11 were Maguindanaoan.<sup>150</sup>

The series of mass slaughter among Muslims precipitated by the report of the Jabitah massacre in 1968 sparked the formation of the MNLF, marking the beginning of the contemporary armed struggle of the Moros in Mindanao.<sup>151</sup> The MNLF, led by its chairman, Nur Misuari, aspired to gain Muslim independence, outlined as the "liberation of the Moro nation from terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism," and to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsamoro people.<sup>152</sup>

A rampant nationwide underground rebellion orchestrated by Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples' Army, as well the uprising of Muslims in the south, compelled Marcos to declare martial law on September 21, 1972.<sup>153</sup> With the imposition of direct military control, the government strictly implemented the collection and confiscation of firearms from civilians, especially in Mindanao, provoking the already brewing Moro rebellion.<sup>154</sup> The MNLF openly waged war against the government to pursue their aims of national liberation and establishment of the Moro nation. Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi supported the MNLF cause.<sup>155</sup> The Alternate Forum for Research in

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<sup>148</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 114.

<sup>149</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*.

<sup>150</sup> Jubair, 151.

<sup>151</sup> Santos and Santos, *Primed and Purposeful*.

<sup>152</sup> Rommel Banlaoi, "'Radical Muslim Terrorism' in the Philippines," in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Andrew T. Tan (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007), 50.

<sup>153</sup> Montiel, Rodil, and de Guzman, "The Moro Struggle."

<sup>154</sup> Santos and Santos, *Primed and Purposeful*.

<sup>155</sup> Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago*.

Mindanao estimated the war death toll of about 100,000 to 120,000 people, of which 50% of those killed were MNLF members, 30% military members and 20% civilians.<sup>156</sup>

### 3. Peace Initiative—The Tripoli Accord

Mounting concerns about the Arab oil embargo of the Philippines due to alleged Muslim mass killings and the support of the OIC to MNLF led Marcos to participate in the peace pact at Tripoli, Libya.<sup>157</sup> The signing of the Tripoli Accord in Libya on December 23, 1976 carved the first peace negotiation framework between the GRP and MNLF. This accord brokered the “establishment of autonomy in the Southern Philippines within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.”<sup>158</sup> The panel signed the agreement under the auspices of the OIC through its Quadripartite Commission in Tripoli, Libya. The agreement laid the groundwork for the future establishment of provisional governments to 13 provinces under the autonomy pact with the respective executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and a regional security force independent of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).<sup>159</sup> The provinces included as areas of autonomy were Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Palawan, and “all cities and villages situated in and above-mentioned areas.”<sup>160</sup>

The stipulations in the Tripoli Agreement also included the proposed provision from Marcos, which reads that “the Philippine government shall undertake all the necessary

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<sup>156</sup> Montiel, Rodil and de Guzman, “The Moro Struggle.”

<sup>157</sup> Ivan Molloy, “The Decline of the Moro National Liberation Front in the Southern Philippines,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 18, no. 1 (1988): 59–76.

<sup>158</sup> Joseph Franco, “Breakthrough for Bangsamoro: Can They Overcome the Odds?” (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, April 11, 2019), 4, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CO19070.pdf>.

<sup>159</sup> “What Ails ARMM,” Institute for Autonomy and Governance, June 2011, [https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/253252/7\\_dokument\\_dok\\_pdf\\_23597\\_1.pdf/e9a70583-733f-142b-5fc2-b43599ddb60?version=1.0&t=1539659394053](https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/253252/7_dokument_dok_pdf_23597_1.pdf/e9a70583-733f-142b-5fc2-b43599ddb60?version=1.0&t=1539659394053).

<sup>160</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 34.

constitutional processes to implement the entire agreement.”<sup>161</sup> Hence, Marcos issued a decree to hold a referendum on April 17, 1977 for the people of the 13 provinces to decide on provisions, such as the creation of a single autonomous region, inclusion of their province under the proposed region, and the creation of a regional assembly.<sup>162</sup> The people rejected the creation of a single autonomous region; Palawan, South Cotabato, and Davao del Sur voted against joining the region, and an overwhelming majority approved the creation of a regional assembly with 2,499,375 affirmative votes; 65,612 negative votes; and 21,176 abstentions.<sup>163</sup> The MNLF rejected the results of the referendum. On July 25, 1979, Marcos created two autonomous regional governments—Regions IX and XII.<sup>164</sup>

Despite the initiated peace process and establishment of ARMM, conflicting goals and traditional tribal rivalries continued within the Muslim communities. Misuari’s goal of unifying Filipino Muslims by inspiring the nationalistic spirit of Bangsamoro was not entirely successful, as it aroused the latent notions of traditional leadership among Muslim elites.<sup>165</sup> Muslim clans of central Mindanao began to challenge Misuari’s ascendancy in the MNLF.<sup>166</sup> The authority and power vested upon the MNLF to lead and represent the Bangsamoro as stipulated in the Tripoli Agreement stirred Muslim traditional elites to negate the idea of Misuari serving as representative of the Muslim community.<sup>167</sup> His deputy, Hashim Salamat, described Misuari’s strategy in leading the MNLF as a mimicry of the secularist strategy of the New People’s Army, which was waging a communist

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<sup>161</sup> Marites D. Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Katipunan, Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Arts, 2000), 34.

<sup>162</sup> Ralph H. Salmi, Cesar Adib Majul, and George Kilpatrick Tanham, *Islam and Conflict Resolution: Theories and Practices* (USA: University Press of America, 1998), 162.

<sup>163</sup> “What Ails ARMM.”

<sup>164</sup> Ferdinand Marcos, Presidential degree No. 168, “Implementing the Organization of the Sangguniang Pampook and the Lupong Tagapagpaganap Ng Pook in Region IX and Region XII and for Other Purposes,” Pub. L. No. 1618 (1979), [https://lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1979/pd\\_1618\\_1979.html](https://lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1979/pd_1618_1979.html).

<sup>165</sup> Joseph Franco, “The Philippines: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front—A Pragmatic Power Structure,” *PRISM*, May 24, 2016, <http://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/780183/chapter-7-the-philippines-the-moro-islamic-liberation-front-a-pragmatic-power-s/>.

<sup>166</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*.

<sup>167</sup> Vitug and Gloria.

insurgency against the Philippine government that disregarded significant Islamic traditions. The competition among Moro leaders over control of the movement produced splinter groups from the MNLF in the late 1970s.<sup>168</sup>

## **B. CORAZON AQUINO ADMINISTRATION (1986-1992)**

### **1. Persistence of Clans**

The Marcos regime ended abruptly due to the People's Power Movement on February 26, 1986. Corazon Aquino, widow of the assassinated Benigno Aquino Jr. who was Marcos' strong political critic and opponent, was installed as president after the People Power Revolt.<sup>169</sup> Datu Zacaria Candao, a Maguindanaoan Muslim leader and United Democratic Organization (UNIDO) chairman in the province, supported Aquino's bid for the presidency. Moreover, Candao served as the aboveground representative of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). He arranged the defection of Marcos' supporters to UNIDO, engaged in counter-coercive moves against Marcos' loyalists, and reduced the incidence of election fraud in the province.<sup>170</sup> Upon Aquino's assumption of office, she appointed Candao the governor of Cotabato province.

Aquino subsequently appointed officers-in-charge in Mindanao provinces pending the crafting of the new Constitution.<sup>171</sup> The officers-in-charge were tasked to control the areas operated by the Dimaporo clan. This move by Aquino depicted her will to reorganize new bargaining arrangements with Muslim political elites.<sup>172</sup> Under the newly organized political structure, Francisco "Paking" Abalos replaced Dimaporo, while Toma Talib, an Iranun Muslim, unseated Dimaporo's brother. Despite their political advantage, the Dimaporos were still able to exhibit their influence in the area and launch armed attacks against the Iranuns.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Strachan, "Conflict Analysis of Muslim Mindanao," 31.

<sup>169</sup> Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago*.

<sup>170</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 238.

<sup>171</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States*.

<sup>172</sup> Lara.

<sup>173</sup> Bentley, "Mohamad Ali Dimaporo."

## 2. Peace Initiative—ARMM

The GPH, aware of the ensuing disagreement amongst Muslim leaders, launched its own diplomatic offensives, resuming peace talks under a unified Moro movement. The talks were inclusive, involving the three MNLF factions: the Tausug faction under Misuari; the Maranao faction under Pundato; and the Maguindanaoan faction under Salamat.<sup>174</sup> In October 1987, Aquino laid the groundwork for a new peace initiative and signed a bill on March 11, 1988 creating a Regional Consultative Commission (RCC).<sup>175</sup> The commission's task was to assist Congress in the crafting and subsequent enactment of an Organic Act establishing the ARMM.<sup>176</sup>

President Aquino focused on programs that provided opportunities to negotiate with the MNLF and address Moro factions and problems.<sup>177</sup> By September 1986, Corazon Aquino paid an official visit with the MNLF leader, Misuari, in Mindanao, where both agreed on a ceasefire and further peace talks.<sup>178</sup> Misuari and representative of the GPH, Aquilino Pimentel, signed the Jeddah Accord, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, by January 3, 1987, which underlined the need for further peace talks and “the grant of full autonomy for Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi.”<sup>179</sup> The peace pact led to the agreement of ending hostilities in Mindanao.<sup>180</sup> However, as the negotiations progressed on February 9 and 20 respectively, the talks eventually collapsed as Misuari demanded the full autonomy of the 23 provinces while the government asserted the autonomy of only 13 provinces, as stipulated in the Tripoli Accord.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*.

<sup>175</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 185.

<sup>176</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*.

<sup>177</sup> Claude A. Buss, *Cory Aquino and the People of the Philippines* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Alumni Association, 1987).

<sup>178</sup> “Moro National Liberation Front,” Stanford University, May 2019, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/moro-national-liberation-front>.

<sup>179</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 38–39.

<sup>180</sup> Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago*.

<sup>181</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro, a Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 185.

On the sidelines, on January 13–17, 1987, the MILF showed its disgruntlement to Aquino’s disregard of its group during negotiations in Jeddah. It launched a full-scale tactical offensive in the areas of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur, and Lanao del Norte, which lasted for five days.<sup>182</sup> The MILF conveyed that it was not a pushover organization, but a power to be reckoned with.<sup>183</sup>

Finally, on August 1, 1989, President Aquino signed into law RA No. 6734, which provided an Organic Act for the creation of ARMM. By November 1989, after the passage of the Organic Act, a plebiscite was held. Of the 3.5 million eligible voters in the 13 provinces, only 55.31% casted their votes.<sup>184</sup> The MNLF refused to recognize the ARMM and boycotted the plebiscite. Four provinces voted in favor of autonomy and were placed under the ARMM: Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao, and Lanao del Sur.<sup>185</sup>

### **C. RAMOS ADMINISTRATION (1992-1998)**

#### **1. Persistence of Clans**

Prominent political leaders persisted during the Fidel Ramos presidency. Zacaria Candao was the ARMM governor from 1990 to 1993, succeeded by Liningning Pangandaman from 1994 to 1996. The governance of ARMM for six years spanning the Aquino and Ramos administrations under the two Muslim leaders showed no tangible impact on poverty alleviation and the susceptibility of the people to violence.<sup>186</sup> Graft and corruption issues plagued the leaderships of Candao and Pangandaman.<sup>187</sup> Candao increased the bureaucracy of the ARMM and bloated its manpower requirements, hiring his relatives and close kin during his term as governor.<sup>188</sup> Pangandaman followed the same

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<sup>182</sup> Jubair, 186.

<sup>183</sup> Jubair.

<sup>184</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 40.

<sup>185</sup> Quimpo, “Oligarchic Rule Ethnocratic Tendencies and Armed Conflict,” 4.

<sup>186</sup> Lara and Champain, “Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao,” 32.

<sup>187</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States*, 242.

<sup>188</sup> Lara, 242.

style of governance upon his assumption of the position, even surpassing the corruption records of Candao's administration.<sup>189</sup>

The bloated ARMM bureaucracy resulted in the penetration of clans and close kin into all levels of the regional government. These political leaders exemplified governance where resources are disbursed through family members and close kin. Clan members and die-hard supporters populated the regional government with about 19,000 employees.<sup>190</sup> Both Candao and Pangandaman were examples of how not to manage an autonomous region.<sup>191</sup> They were politicians who forged their domination by the extent of how they could amass additional wealth, power, and allegiance through their vicious rhetoric of autonomous self-rule.

Noting these anomalous conditions, the central government tried all possible solutions to shape the devolution of authority to the regional government according to the people and state's interest. Meanwhile, the MNLF asserted its version of autonomous ruling with intentions to cover more provinces within the ARMM, empower the regional assembly to draft its economic priorities and budget with little interference from the Congress, and empower the regional government with an independent security force.<sup>192</sup> These intentions generated from reassessing the present Organic Law on the ARMM somehow found their place during the peace negotiation with the Ramos administration.

While the ARMM continued to exist under an anomalous and bloated bureaucracy, the MNLF clamored for more autonomy. The Ramos administration continued to seek avenues to solve Mindanao's perennial problems. In mid-1996, Ramos reopened peace talks with the MNLF with Malaysia and the OIC. However, the negotiated interim agreements alarmed a faction of "Christian" politicians and landlords. They started to campaign against the peace pact and questioned the agreement on its constitutional and

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<sup>189</sup> Eric Gutierrez, *Rebels, Warlords, and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in Southern Philippines* (Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000).

<sup>190</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 78.

<sup>191</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*.

<sup>192</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States*.

legal grounds.<sup>193</sup> These prominent political leaders, led by three congresswomen from Mindanao known as the “Tres Marias,” Maria Clara Lobregat of Zamboanga City, Daisy Avance-Fuentes of South Cotabato, and Lualhati Antonio of North Cotabato, stridently voiced their constituents’ anti-Moro and anti-Muslim sentiments.<sup>194</sup> The “Tres Marias” heavily criticized the Ramos government for capitulating to the MNLF and negotiating with the rebel organization. They staged rallies and warned the government of dire consequences and even “vowed that only over their dead bodies would they allow a rebel group to rule Mindanao.”<sup>195</sup>

## **2. Peace Initiative—Final Peace Accord**

The Ramos administration marked diplomatic breakthroughs through a series of peace negotiations with Misuari. Ramos’ negotiating formula consisted of economic and political concessions.<sup>196</sup> This included expanding the ARMM through legislation; offering key MNLF leader’s positions in the government and convincing other members to integrate with government police and military. The GRP and the MNLF engaged in several peace talks within the said conditions, mediated by Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya, Suharto of Indonesia, and the OIC. During the negotiations, the Philippine government and the MNLF signed several Statements of Understanding and Interim Agreements beginning from 1992 to 1996.<sup>197</sup>

After several peace meetings, the GRP and the MNLF formally signed the “Final Peace Agreement” in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1996.<sup>198</sup> The provisions of the agreement provided a two-phase implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. Phase I comprised of a three-year transitional period featuring a massive program of socio-economic development for the 13 provinces covered by the Tripoli Agreement under a special

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<sup>193</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2016): 67.

<sup>194</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 56.

<sup>195</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao,” 67.

<sup>196</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*.

<sup>197</sup> “Moro National Liberation Front,” Stanford University.

<sup>198</sup> Quimpo, “Oligarchic Rule Ethnocratic Tendencies and Armed Conflict,” 147.

program called the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). Phase II envisioned the possible amendment or repeal of the ARMM Organic Act, wherein a plebiscite would be conducted on inclusion in the ARMM and the inauguration of a new autonomous region.<sup>199</sup>

Allowing a three-year transitional period of intensive peace and development efforts under the management of the MNLF differentiates the Ramos administration agreement. This scheme gave the MNLF a chance to run transitional structures of autonomy and prove its effectiveness in governance. It also offered opportunities to gain popular support within the 13 provinces to vote for inclusion in the autonomous region.<sup>200</sup> After the signing of the 1996 final accord, Ramos appointed Misuari as SPCPD chairman and supported his candidacy for ARMM governor.

Despite the massive government support given to the ARMM through the SPCPD, the agreement still failed. The ARMM “continued to be the poorest, the most neglected, the least productive, and the worst-performing region in the country in almost all measures.”<sup>201</sup> The fact-finding mission of the OIC concluded that the ARMM became dysfunctional and failed to control tensions from building up since clan feuds internal within the region have proliferated. Likewise, corruption attributed to the bureaucracy created by the former regional governors continued to taint the regional government. Rather than reducing the employed personnel, Misuari even added MNLF members to the already bloated pool of employees.<sup>202</sup>

In the late 1980s, the MILF resistance increased, demanding a shift of focus for the GPH. On July 18, 1997, the GRP and the MILF signed an Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities (AGCH) to possibly start exploratory peace talks with mechanisms on the cessation of hostilities.

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<sup>199</sup> Quimpo.

<sup>200</sup> Quimpo.

<sup>201</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “Mindanao, Southern Philippines the Pitfalls of Working for Peace in a Time of Political Decay,” in *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and South-East Asia*, ed. Rajat Ganguly, 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2012), 123.

<sup>202</sup> Jacques Bertrand, “Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement Is Fragile,” *Pacific Affairs* 73 (2000): 45.

## **D. ESTRADA ADMINISTRATION (1998-2001)**

### **1. Persistence of Clans**

When Estrada assumed the presidency, the MNLF was in hiatus, with Misuari sitting as ARMM governor.<sup>203</sup> Misuari's integration into the government caused the MNLF members to believe in his complete disregard to the Moro ideals. This resulted in the power decline of the rebel group and the failure of the regional government to establish order over ensuing tensions and clan feuds in the area.<sup>204</sup>

The ceasefire mechanism cited on the AGCH in 1997 did not prevent inter-clan hostilities at the community level in Mindanao.<sup>205</sup> Armed aggressions between private armies and local militias persisted in the region. Clans addressed land disputes and financial debts with violence. The hostilities escalated into active warfare by March 2000. The MILF showcased their forces throughout Mindanao and began attacking power transmission lines, causing massive power interruptions.<sup>206</sup>

### **2. Peace Initiative and the “All-Out War”**

President Joseph Estrada attempted to establish ties with the MILF. Estrada enlisted his friend, Robert Aventajado, to reach out to the MILF leadership. Aventajado, a rich businessman and investment consultant with several connections to non-government organizations (NGOs), academia, and the business community, crafted the political machine known as the Citizens Movement for Justice, Economy, Environment, and Peace (JEEP). Estrada used JEEP, a cleverly coined word to stand for Joseph Ejercito Estrada for Peace, to attract votes and imprint on people's mind his campaign appellation. JEEP, as an unconventional campaign organization, tapped grassroots communities to include the

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<sup>203</sup> Cesar Pobre and Raymond Jose Quilop, eds., *In Assertion of Sovereignty* (Quezon City, Philippines: Armed Forces of the Philippines Office of the Strategic Studies, 2008).

<sup>204</sup> Lara, *Insurgents, Clans, and States Political Legitimacy and Resurgent Conflict in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines*.

<sup>205</sup> Franco, “The Philippines: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front—A Pragmatic Power Structure.”

<sup>206</sup> Franco, 175.

MILF. The JEEP established linkage with the MILF through a political front known as the Alliance of Muslims in the Philippines (AMP).<sup>207</sup>

Even if exploratory peace talks between the MILF and the Ramos administration progressed into formal negotiations beginning in October 1999, the Estrada administration deemed an impasse to the ongoing peace talks.<sup>208</sup> On March 21, 2000, the AFP, under orders of Estrada, launched a major military campaign known as the 2000 “All-Out War.”<sup>209</sup> The seven-month campaign seized all 46 MILF camps, including its main headquarters in Camp Abubakar. The hoisting of the Philippine flag at the core of Camp Abubakar on July 10, 2000 severed the prospects of continuing peace negotiations with the MILF.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The complicated nature of Muslim society affected the success and failure of every regime in achieving peace in Mindanao. The unstable security situation in Muslim Mindanao enabled clan elites to dominate the political arena of the region. Plagued by sectoral violence and land disputes due to the migration policy since the colonial period, clans provided resources and security to their family and kin. The presence of armed secessionist rebel groups poses the greatest challenge for the Philippine government to design the perfect peace platform in Mindanao.

President Marcos employed clan politics to unite political elites who supported him and isolate armed groups who opposed him. The escalated armed violence in the region caught the attention of international actors, prompting third party intervention. The GRP and the MNLF forged the Tripoli Agreement. The agreement stipulated the creation of an autonomous region subject to a referendum. However, persistent violence affected the people’s decision. Out of the 13 provinces, 3 provinces voted against joining the proposed

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<sup>207</sup> Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 156.

<sup>208</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao,” 69.

<sup>209</sup> Quimpo, 149.

autonomous region. Hence, clan politics contributed to the failure to attain peace in the region.

During the Aquino and the Ramos administrations, poor governance and corruption characterized the leadership of clan elites in the autonomous region. The evident nepotism in the region's bureaucracy exemplified the negative trait of clan dynamics. Likewise, the corrupt practices of local executives contributed to making the region the poorest in the country. These practices caused the failure of establishing a strong autonomous regional government.

President Ramos proposed the creation of the SPCPD to circumvent the terms of the initial Tripoli Agreement without violating the Philippine constitution. However, Christian political elites objected to the proposed council, accusing the Ramos government of favoring the rebel groups and questioning its legality. Christian political clans staged campaigns against the creation of the SPCPD, adversely affecting the prospect of creating a lasting peace in the region. Even Ramos' SPCPD under Misuari failed due to the remnants of the bureaucracy created by the previous clan elites' leadership of the regional government.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Bertrand, "Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines," 45.

## **IV. ROLE OF CLANS IN THE BARMM (2001-2022)**

The struggle to end the protracted peacemaking process in Mindanao evolved from 2001 to the present. The Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) administration from 2001 to 2010 approached the peace process with more diplomacy focusing on peace talks and the proposed reclamation of ancestral domains. The Benigno Aquino III administration from 2010 to 2016 advocated for a three-pronged convergence strategy, which gained support from different political clans in the region. The Rodrigo Duterte administration from 2016 to 2022 pursued the gains of the previous peace pacts, creating an enhanced autonomous region for the Moros known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

### **A. ARROYO ADMINISTRATION (2001-2010)**

#### **1. Persistence of Clans**

The ouster of President Joseph Estrada in January 2001 paved the way for the accession of Vice President Arroyo to the presidency. Arroyo's new administration immediately espoused the policy of "all-out peace," a reversal of the previous administration's "all-out war" policy. At the same time, and challenged by legitimacy issues after being seated as president through people power, GMA was desperate to win the presidential elections in 2004. She was aware that the Mindanao votes would be critical, so she sought support from the Ampatuan clan in Maguindanao.

However, Arroyo also relied on the Ampatuan clan, not only for crucial votes but also for its full support in the protracted armed conflict in Mindanao.<sup>211</sup> In July 2001, Arroyo's government revitalized the disbanded Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). CAFGUs are civilians recruited by the AFP to act as territorial militias tasked to protect their home areas against insurgents.<sup>212</sup> Arroyo expanded the program by

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<sup>211</sup> Human Rights Watch, ed., *"They Own the People": The Ampatuans, State-Backed Militias and Killings in the Southern Philippines* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2010).

<sup>212</sup> Irineo C Espino, "Counterinsurgency the Role of Paramilitaries" (Thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 34, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/1269>.

allowing the local governments to utilize CAFGU forces, Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVO), and police auxiliary forces in the fight against internal security threats.<sup>213</sup> In 2006, Arroyo issued an Executive Order after major armed encounters between the 105<sup>th</sup> MILF Base Command and the militiamen of the Ampatuan clan from June 28 to July 6, 2006.<sup>214</sup> This order was interpreted as arming village-based enforcers to act as “force multipliers” of the police force in counterinsurgency operations.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, clan members holding local executive positions deputized CVOs as force multipliers and provided the requisite ammunition to fight against the MILF.<sup>216</sup> The policy caused confusion and the unintended consequences of human rights abuses committed by state-backed militias.<sup>217</sup>

## **2. The Maguindanao Massacre**

The Maguindanao Massacre illustrated the abusive power of the Ampatuan clan. In November 2009, the Ampatuans and their private armies killed 57 unarmed civilians. This incident resulted from the rivalry between two political clans in Maguindanao: Ampatuan versus Mangudadatu.<sup>218</sup> The victims included the wife and two sisters of Esmael Mangudadatu, a gubernatorial candidate seeking to challenge the reign of the Ampatuans. At the time of the massacre, Zaldy Ampatuan was the ARMM governor. He and his younger brother, Andal Jr., then mayor of Datu Unsay municipality, were charged with 57 counts of murder together with their father and 98 other accused persons.<sup>219</sup>

President Arroyo immediately created the Independent Commission against Private Armies (ICAPA) to dismantle private armies. As of 2010, there were 20 private armed groups (PAGs) identified within the ARMM, comprising roughly 2,916 members (see

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<sup>213</sup> Artemio Dumlao, “Gov’t to Reactivate CAFGU - Villanueva,” *Philippine Star*, July 10, 2001.

<sup>214</sup> Jeoffrey Maitem, “MILF, Militia Clash in Maguindanao,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 29, 2006.

<sup>215</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Own the People*.

<sup>216</sup> Jaileen F. Jimeno, “In Maguindanao, No One Dares Cross the Ampatuans,” GMA News Online, November 24, 2009, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/177671/news/specialreports/in-maguindanao-no-one-dares-cross-the-ampatuans/>.

<sup>217</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Own the People*, 23.

<sup>218</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Own the People*.

<sup>219</sup> Human Rights Watch, 3.

Table 2).<sup>220</sup> Of the 5 ARMM provinces, Sulu has the highest, with 7 PAGs under the control of prominent clans. However, Maguindanao has the highest number of PAG members at 1,596.<sup>221</sup>

Table 2. Private Armed Groups in ARMM Provinces and Number of Members (as of April 2010)<sup>222</sup>

Province	Number of PAGS	Number of Members
Basilan	4	700
Lanao del Sur	1	100
Maguindanao	3	1,596
Sulu	7	380
Tawi-Tawi	5	140
Total	20	2,916

### 3. Peace Initiative—MOA-AD

The peace panel from the government and the MILF eventually carved out the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in July 2008, a solution deemed to serve as the final peace treaty in Mindanao.<sup>223</sup> The MOA-AD delineated the scope of the expanded Bangsamoro region to include the provinces of ARMM and other towns of North and South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Zamboanga, and the six municipalities of Lanao del Norte and 738 *barangays* (villages) scattered throughout Central and Western Mindanao.<sup>224</sup> “Ancestral domain” refers to the MILF demands on sufficient control of economic resources of the land, a government structure reflective of Moro culture, and a territory that defines a Moro homeland, to be called the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity

<sup>220</sup> Edna A. Co et al., *State of Local Democracy in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (SoLD ARMM)* (Quezon City: National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines Diliman and the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy, 2013), 67.

<sup>221</sup> Co et al., 68.

<sup>222</sup> Co et al., 68.

<sup>223</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao.”

<sup>224</sup> Steven Rood, “The Role of International Actors in the Search for Peace in Mindanao,” in *Mindanao the Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity* (Singapore: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2018), 74.

(BJE).<sup>225</sup> However, the deal was vehemently opposed by prominent Christian politicians, denoting that the negotiation was crafted without due consultation and transparency. Further, it was predicted that the agreement would eventually lead to the declaration of the region as an independent entity by the MILF.<sup>226</sup>

The majority of the lower house of Congress signed a resolution contesting the MOA-AD with a majority of 136 votes out of 238 members.<sup>227</sup> The scheduled signing of the MOA-AD in Malaysia on August 5, 2008 was aborted. The Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order against the government peace panel from signing the agreement.<sup>228</sup> Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that the MOA-AD was unconstitutional.

Angered by the aborted negotiation and breakdown of the peace process, the MILF commanders, Ameril Omra Kato and Abdurahman “Bravo” Macapaar, resumed violent actions against the government. Omra Kato subsequently established the MILF breakaway group known as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).<sup>229</sup> Both commanders launched a series of attacks in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte, causing dozens of people to be wounded and killed.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, as the violence escalated, an estimated 750,000 people throughout Mindanao were internally displaced by 2008. Eventually, the GRP dissolved the peace panel and reversed the negotiation theme into “demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and community consultation beyond armed groups.”<sup>231</sup> The

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<sup>225</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, “This Land Is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and Its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines,” *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2007): 83.

<sup>226</sup> Paolo Romero, “GMA Cancels MOA-AD,” *Philstar.com*, August 22, 2008, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2008/08/22/80724/gma-cancels-moa-ad>; Mike Frialde, “SC Asked to Stop Government from Signing MOA with MILF,” *Philstar.Com*, August 12, 2008, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2008/08/12/78894/sc-asked-stop-government-signing-moa-milf>.

<sup>227</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao,” 72.

<sup>228</sup> Rood, “The Role of International Actors in the Search for Peace in Mindanao,” 74.

<sup>229</sup> Rood.

<sup>230</sup> “The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao,” International Crisis Group, October 23, 2008, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/philippines-collapse-peace-mindanao>.

<sup>231</sup> Rood, “The Role of International Actors in the Search for Peace in Mindanao,” 75.

consultation refers to the wide-range focused group discussion facilitated by the Bishops-Ulama Conference.<sup>232</sup>

Despite another setback in the peace process, the MOA-AD provided the framework for the subsequent negotiations. The Arroyo government's failure to conduct consultations on the MOA-AD arguably caused its breakdown.<sup>233</sup> Christian political leaders, clans, and tribes such as the Lumads, Teduray, and Eranun-Manobo, claimed equal rights in the peace pact provisions on ancestral domains.<sup>234</sup> These demands from the indigenous people of Mindanao intensified the already contentious MOA-AD fiasco.<sup>235</sup>

## **B. AQUINO III ADMINISTRATION (2010-2016)**

### **1. Persistence of Clans**

President Benigno “PNoy” Aquino III, son of then-President Corazon Aquino, succeeded Arroyo’s presidency. Upon his assumption, PNoy was up to restart the stalled peace negotiation with his peace policy articulated during his election campaign.<sup>236</sup> Aware of the frailty of the ARMM, PNoy instigated the convergence peace initiative involving the cooperation and support of the provincial governors and political leaders from prominent clans.<sup>237</sup> The strategy aimed to accomplish three objectives: review the MNLF-GRP peace agreement, reform the ARMM, and initiate a peace agreement with the MILF. The third objective proved contentious to the local executives, since a peace settlement

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<sup>232</sup> Carolyn O. Arguillas, “Konsult Mindanaw Presents Findings to MILF; MILF Says ‘We Want Agreement Acceptable to All,’” *MindaNews*, November 23, 2009, <https://www.mindanews.com/peace-process/2009/11/konsult-mindanaw-presents-findings-to-milf-milf-says-%e2%80%9cwe-want-agreement-acceptable-to-all%e2%80%9d/>.

<sup>233</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao.”

<sup>234</sup> “The Philippines: Indigenous Rights and the MILF Peace Process,” International Crisis Group, November 2011, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/213-the-philippines-indigenous-rights-and-the-milf-peace-process.pdf>.

<sup>235</sup> “The Philippines: A New Strategy for Peace in Mindanao?” International Crisis Group, August 3, 2011), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b125-the-philippines-a-new-strategy-for-peace-in-mindanao.pdf>.

<sup>236</sup> Miriam Coronel Ferrer, “Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges,” in *Mindanao The Long Journey to Peace*, ed. Paul D. Hutchcroft (Singapore: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2018), 99.

<sup>237</sup> “The Philippines: A New Strategy for Peace in Mindanao?”

with the MILF would lead to the abolition of the ARMM and give rise to an enhanced autonomous region.

Constitutional issues continued to hound the peace process during PNoy's administration. PNoy was specific in that the peace process only identified "core territories" required to participate in the plebiscite.<sup>238</sup> Governor Abdusakur Tan, a Tausug from Sulu, was one of the vocal critics of the peace agreement. Since the mid-1980s, Tan has been a prominent politician serving as congressman and then governor.<sup>239</sup> PNoy persuaded him to join the cause for peace by articulating power-sharing relations appropriate for the Bangsamoro and the Local Government Units (LGUs) within the context of ARMM.<sup>240</sup>

PNoy's reform agenda for the ARMM was mapped out with utmost circumspection. To ensure the support of elected ARMM officials for the peace process, he designated Governor Mujiv Hataman as the officer in charge of the regional government. Hataman is an ethnic Yakan belonging to the Hataman clan of Basilan Province.<sup>241</sup> PNoy was cognizant of Hataman's ability as a statesman who could create improvements in the autonomous region. However, Hataman's designation earned the ire of Jum Akbar, then Governor of Basilan. Jum was the wife of the Akbar patriarch, Wahab, who was killed in a bombing incident in Congress in 2008.<sup>242</sup> Former Basilan Governor Salapuddin and Mujiv Hataman were suspects in the said incident.<sup>243</sup> Mujiv was eventually cleared from the case, while Salapuddin was issued a warrant of arrest and went into hiding.

Despite the challenges, PNoy remained resolute in advancing his peace policy. He continued to foster unity and generously supported the projects of ARMM. Moreover, to

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<sup>238</sup> Ferrer, "Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges," 118.

<sup>239</sup> "Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro."

<sup>240</sup> Ferrer, "Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges."

<sup>241</sup> "Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro."

<sup>242</sup> "Power Shift in Basilan," *The Philippines: Local Politics in the Sulu Archipelago and the Peace Process* (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2012), 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep32226.6>.

<sup>243</sup> "Power Shift in Basilan," 10.

avoid insecurities and opposition by the influential political players in the LGUs, the GPH peace panel ascertained that the rights and privileges devolved to the LGU under the 1991 Local Government Code should not be affected.<sup>244</sup> Likewise, the Bangsamoro government framework emphasizes a “just and equitable” sharing of revenues from the region’s tax levies and natural resources.<sup>245</sup>

## **2. Peace Initiative—Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro**

The ARMM governors supported PNoy’s peace terms. In hindsight, Governor Tan of Sulu and Sadikul Sahali of Tawi-Tawi cooperated to support the MILF peace process.<sup>246</sup> Eventually, governors in the “core territories” of ARMM, including Akhbar of Basilan, Mamintal Alonto-Adiong Jr of Lanao del Sur, and Ismael “Toto” Mangudadatu of Maguindanao, signified their support for a peace agreement platform after a series of forums, statements, and resolutions.<sup>247</sup> All negotiations followed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) structure.

In 2012, the FAB, outlining the roadmap of the regional government structure with an emphasis on the expansion of ARMM’s power towards its territories, was finally signed. It annexed specific core power-sharing and wealth-sharing features of the agreement, including a post-conflict disposition of armed militias and detailed modalities on the Bangsamoro concept of government.<sup>248</sup> The FAB eventually progressed into creating the Transition Commission that drafted the Bangsamoro Basic Law.<sup>249</sup>

By March 2014, after the provisions on FAB were explicitly laid out and reached consensus, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was subsequently

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<sup>244</sup> Ferrer, “Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges,” 114.

<sup>245</sup> Franco, “Breakthrough for Bangsamoro: Can They Overcome the Odds?,” 176.

<sup>246</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro.”

<sup>247</sup> Ferrer, “Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges,” 118.

<sup>248</sup> “Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro,” October 15, 2012, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH\\_121015\\_FrameworkAgreementBangsamoro.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH_121015_FrameworkAgreementBangsamoro.pdf).

<sup>249</sup> “Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro.”

created and signed.<sup>250</sup> The CAB conveys the GPH-MILF resolution, which “consolidates and affirms the understanding and commitment of the GPH and the MILF” and “ends armed hostilities between the two parties.”<sup>251</sup> In addition, the CAB proposed a ministerial form of government with an asymmetric relationship with the central government. The ministerial form of government was envisioned for people to vote for political parties rather than clans and personalities.<sup>252</sup>

The realization of the CAB required the enactment of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). By September 2014, Congress submitted the draft BBL to PNoy. The PNoy administration projected the BBL passing and the Bangsamoro elections conducted simultaneously with the general elections in May 2016.<sup>253</sup> However, a tragic anti-terrorist operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, in January 2015 halted the entire peace process.<sup>254</sup>

### **3. Mamasapano Incident**

On January 25, 2015, the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) launched an operation targeting two of Southeast Asia’s most wanted terrorists: Jemaah Islamiyah-affiliated extremists Zulkifli Abdhir (also known as Marwan) and Abdul Basit Usman in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.<sup>255</sup> Although the PNP successfully neutralized Marwan, their extraction led to an unexpected clash between PNP forces and the MILF, BIFF, and clan private armies on the ground. The incident resulted in the death of 44 members of the PNP SAF, 17 Muslim fighters, and 5 civilians.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Franco, *Elections and Democratization in the Philippines*, 176.

<sup>251</sup> “Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro,” March 27, 2014, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH\\_140327\\_ComprehensiveAgreementBangsamoro.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH_140327_ComprehensiveAgreementBangsamoro.pdf).

<sup>252</sup> Abhoud Syed M. Linga, “Building the Bangsamoro Government,” in *Mindanao: The Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity* (Singapore: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2018), 136.

<sup>253</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao,” 74.

<sup>254</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao.”

<sup>255</sup> Maitem, “MILF, Militia Clash in Maguindanao.”

<sup>256</sup> Quimpo, “Mindanao,” 75.

The incident gained widespread condemnation to the detriment of PNoy and, more importantly, the peace process. Political opponents stirred up “anti-Moro demagoguery” by biasedly linking the incident to terrorism, accusing Moros as the culprits.<sup>257</sup> Anti-Moro sentiments rose, and people demanded the scrapping of the BBL. Congress immediately suspended the deliberation on the BBL. With elections coming up in 2016, Congress deemed it appropriate to move the BBL deliberations for the next president.<sup>258</sup>

## **C. DUTERTE ADMINISTRATION (2016-2022)**

### **1. Persistence of Clans**

Political clans continue to dominate the ARMM during the present administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. The five “core territories” of ARMM are represented by political elites from respective powerful clans of the provinces. Maguindanao is led by Governor Bai Mariam Ampatuan Mangudadatu. Bai Mariam exemplifies the traditional Muslim kinship acquired through marriage despite the previous history of severe clan feud between Ampatuan and Mangudadatu in 2009. Her election in 2019 was a promising opportunity that may eventually lead to the unity of the rival clans in the province.<sup>259</sup>

Moreover, political elites dominated governments in other ARMM provinces in the 2019 elections. In Lanao del Sur, the Alonto-Adiong clan exercises dominance in the political arena with their kin in the roles of the province’s governor, vice-governor, and congressmen.<sup>260</sup> The Hataman clan, which governed the Basilan Province, regained dominance over the region upon winning the gubernatorial seat from Akhbar. In Tawi-Tawi, a new governor, Ysmael “Tata” Sali, won over its reigning leader Sadikul Sahali.<sup>261</sup> Tawi-Tawi is a relatively peaceful province with less conflict involving the Moro armed

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<sup>257</sup> Quimpo, 77.

<sup>258</sup> Jeoffrey Maitem, “Congress Adjourns, Fails to Pass BBL,” *Inquirer.net*, February 4, 2016, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/761319/congress-adjourns-fails-to-pass-bbl>.

<sup>259</sup> Orlando Dinoy, “5 Maguindanao Clans Unite as Mangudadatu Kin Split,” *Inquirer.net*, April 5, 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1103385/5-maguindanao-clans-unite-as-mangudadatu-kin-split>.

<sup>260</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro.”

<sup>261</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro.”

groups. In Sulu, Abdusakur Tan, the clan patriarch, remains active in Sulu politics and openly refutes the GRP-MILF peace process.

Accordingly, Governor Tan opposes the creation of an autonomous region in Mindanao, citing ethnicity concerns and the effectiveness of MILF rebel leaders to head the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). Conversely, Tan's concern was about the potential dominance of Maguindanaoans in the Bangsamoro Parliament that might affect the fiscal autonomy of the LGUs.<sup>262</sup> Accordingly, the Tans benefit mainly from patronage politics and the regular funding allocation, the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), from the national government.<sup>263</sup>

## **2. Peace Initiative—Bangsamoro Organic Law**

After years of peace negotiations, the GRP and the MILF finally carved out the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The BBL was initially stalled due to the botched counterterrorism operation known as the Mamasapano Incident. In 2017, the process was further delayed due to the Marawi Siege, where the ASG tried to establish Marawi City as an Islamic Caliphate.<sup>264</sup> The incident resulted in a five-month battle between the government forces and the ASG, resulting in massive casualties, infrastructure destruction, and hundreds of thousands displaced. The incident, however, highlighted the urgency for the passing of the BBL. During the deliberations, Congress changed the BBL to conform to the constitution. The BBL became the BOL in the final version, but the included provisions were like the original version.<sup>265</sup> In 2019, after careful

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<sup>262</sup> “The Philippines Local Politics in the Sulu-Archipelago and the Peace Process,” International Crisis Group, May 15, 2012, 2, [https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975\\_HRD-9812-0185](https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9812-0185).

<sup>263</sup> “The Philippines Local Politics in the Sulu-Archipelago and the Peace Process.”

<sup>264</sup> “Philippines: ‘Battle of Marawi’ Leaves Trail of Death and Destruction,” Amnesty International, November 17, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/philippines-battle-of-marawi-leaves-trail-of-death-and-destruction/>.

<sup>265</sup> Ver Marcelo, “The Bangsamoro Organic Law: Everything You Need to Know,” *CNN Philippines*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/07/24/bangsamoro-organic-law-primer-everything-you-need-to-know-bbl.html>.

deliberations by Congress, the president signed the BOL, ushering in the implementation of the BARMM.<sup>266</sup>

The BARMM provides an enhanced autonomy to Muslim Mindanao, a significant improvement compared to its predecessor, the ARMM. To correct the flaws of the ARMM, the BOL included provisions that provided the BARMM regional government more independence from the central government. The BARMM regional government will run parallel with the central government and perform similar functions except in security, where the AFP and the PNP will remain within the latter's jurisdiction.<sup>267</sup> The BARMM will be structured as a government capable of legislating its laws with ministerial control and supervision of its local executives. Likewise, fiscal autonomy is afforded to the BARMM; it can manage and implement its programs with less control from the central government. However, these two provisions sparked concerns from local executives and clan members in the region. The Sulu archipelago governors were concerned on centralization of power by Maguindanao elites that could have removed their direct access to funds from the central government.<sup>268</sup>

The ARMM population provided overwhelming support for the BOL ratification. Many voters participated in the 2019 plebiscite for the BOL ratification. Out of 1.5 million voters, 88% voted "Yes" to ratification, while only 11% voted "No." With the overwhelming "Yes" votes, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) declared the BOL ratified, ushering in the creation of the BARMM and abolishing the ARMM (see Figure 1).<sup>269</sup> Only Governor Tan of Sulu was against the ratification. He declared himself the leader of the five provinces with close alliances to the local executives.<sup>270</sup> However, Tawi-

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<sup>266</sup> Christina Mendez, "Duterte to Lead Ceremonial Signing of BOL," *Philstar.Com*, August 5, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/08/05/1839802/duterte-lead-ceremonial-signing-bol>.

<sup>267</sup> Congress of the Philippines, "An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734," Pub. L. No. 11054 (2018), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/07jul/20180727-RA-11054-RRD.pdf>.

<sup>268</sup> "The Philippines Local Politics in the Sulu-Archipelago and the Peace Process," 2.

<sup>269</sup> "Results: Bangsamoro Organic Law Plebiscite," *Rappler*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/221316-results-bangsamoro-plebiscite-2019/>.

<sup>270</sup> "The Philippines Local Politics in the Sulu-Archipelago and the Peace Process."

Tawi and Basilan voted overwhelmingly in favor of the BOL, which was against the desire of Governor Tan.

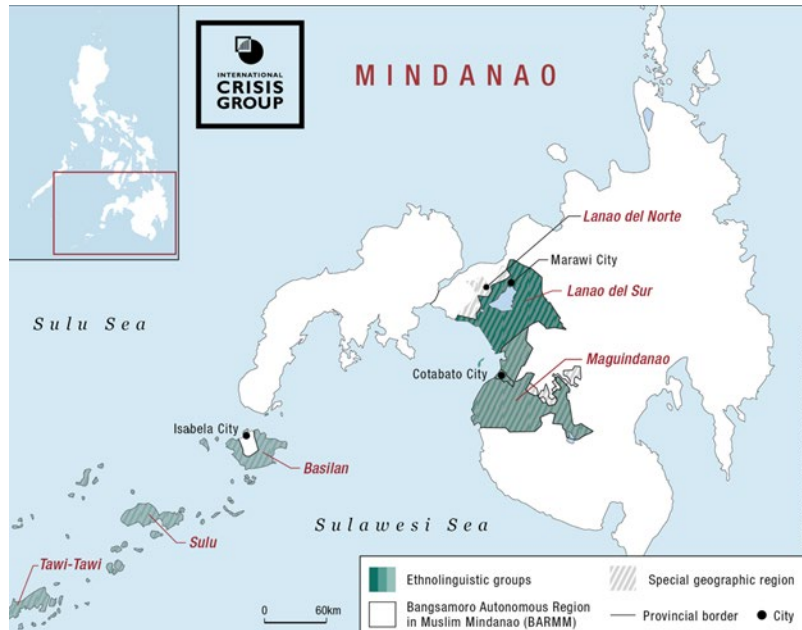


Figure 1. Map of Mindanao Showing BARMM Provinces<sup>271</sup>

### 3. The BARMM and the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) (2019-2022)

President Duterte appointed the BTA members and subsequently launched the BARMM in 2019. Al Hadj Murad Ebrahim, the current MILF chair, heads the BTA as the Chief Minister. The MILF nominated the majority of the 79 members to include former MNLF rebel leaders and representatives from women, youth, Christians, indigenous groups, and even clan affiliates.<sup>272</sup> While in the transition period, all powers and functions

<sup>271</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro,” 32.

<sup>272</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro.”

of the BARMM regional government rest on the BTA.<sup>273</sup> In March 2019, the president launched the BARMM to replace the ARMM.<sup>274</sup>

*a. Government Structure*

The BARMM adopted a parliamentary model of government with a proportional representation voting system. Studies have shown that the proportional representation system allows greater opportunities for all political parties to be elected and is considered a true representation system.<sup>275</sup> It is a system that can somehow reduce elitist politics. The BARMM parliament is broken down as 50% via proportional representation, 40% as single district representation, and 10% as sectoral representation.<sup>276</sup>

Enhancing governance in the region is the priority of the BARMM government. The BTA, with the support of the GPH, seeks to uplift the living conditions in the region. One of the main challenges of the BARMM Chief Minister, former rebel Al Haj Murad, is his lack of governing experience.<sup>277</sup> The Sulu governor raised said concern citing the failures of former rebel regional governors in leading the ARMM.<sup>278</sup> Plagued with corruption for years, the region is the poorest in the country.<sup>279</sup> To address the problem, the chief minister made “moral governance,” anchored on the moral virtues of Islam, as

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<sup>273</sup> Congress of the Philippines, “An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734.”

<sup>274</sup> Malcolm Cook, “Three Challenges Facing the Bangsamoro Organic Law” (Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, December 26, 2018), 10.

<sup>275</sup> Luie Tito Guia, “Review of the Legal and Institutional Framework on the Holding of the 2022 Parliamentary Elections in the BARMM” (Cotabato City, Philippines: Institute for Autonomy and Governance, July 2020), 4, [http://iag.org.ph/images/pdf/Policy\\_Report\\_July\\_2020\\_final.pdf](http://iag.org.ph/images/pdf/Policy_Report_July_2020_final.pdf).

<sup>276</sup> Congress of the Philippines, “An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734.”

<sup>277</sup> Abuza and Lischin, “The Challenges Facing the Philippines’ Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year,” 10–11.

<sup>278</sup> “Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro.”

<sup>279</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, “2018 Poverty Statistics in ARMM,” February 4, 2020, <http://rssoarmm.psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/006%202018%20Poverty%20Statistics%20in%20ARMM.pdf>.

the regional government's administrative focus.<sup>280</sup> The program entails the setting up of mechanisms for the new regional government based on the BTA mandates as stipulated in the BOL.<sup>281</sup> In 2022, the BTA enacted three out of seven legislative codes, while the BARMM Local Government Code is still in process. This Local Government Code should strengthen the supervisory power of the regional government to its LGUs.<sup>282</sup>

**b. *Fiscal Autonomy and Accountability***

With enhanced autonomy from the central government, the BARMM now has exclusive powers over budgeting. Unlike the ARMM, which begged for funds from the national government, a block grant is regularly provided to the BARMM by the national government as stipulated in the BOL.<sup>283</sup> The law provides that the BARMM has fiscal autonomy in the programming and utilization of the grant following the central government accounting system.<sup>284</sup> Apart from the block grant, the BARMM is also getting a more significant share from the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) and funds for Special Development. All the funding is intended to fast-track the region's economic progress and peace efforts. The BTA distributed funds to LGUs that were not receiving regular IRAs from the central government.<sup>285</sup> Likewise, it narrowed the funding gap allocated to its provinces. As a sign of progress, poverty incidence dropped by 16%.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Julmunir Jannaral, "Bangsamoro Moral Governance to Continue," *The Manila Times*, January 24, 2022, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/01/24/news/regions/bangsamoro-moral-governance-to-continue/1830351>.

<sup>281</sup> Congress of the Philippines, "An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734."

<sup>282</sup> Abuza and Lischin, "The Challenges Facing the Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year," 12.

<sup>283</sup> Congress of the Philippines, "An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734"; Ferrer, "Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges," 114.

<sup>284</sup> Congress of the Philippines, "An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734."

<sup>285</sup> "Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro."

<sup>286</sup> Bangsamoro Information Office, "PSA: BARMM's Poverty Incidence Declines in 3 Years," *BARMM Official website* (blog), December 24, 2021, <https://bangsamoro.gov.ph/news/latest-news/psa-barmms-poverty-incidence-declines-in-3-years/>.

Lack of accountability among local executives was one of the challenges of the ARMM. Section 3 of the ARMM law prescribed that general auditing was not included in its function.<sup>287</sup> Likewise, security for the auditors was an issue in certain areas of the region.<sup>288</sup> This weakness enabled local executives to spend large sums of IRAs and maintain their private armies. Conversely, the BOL stipulates that the COA is the official auditing body of BARMM, and the BTA can also create an internal auditing office.<sup>289</sup> Further, in support of the moral governance mandate by the chief minister, a parliament member filed a bill on the creation of a “Bantay-Korupsiyun” (Guard-Corruption) office in 2021.<sup>290</sup>

**c. Conflict Management**

With the full support from the national government, the BTA was able to bridge gaps and establish mechanisms in trying to unify the Moros. External and internal competition of ethnic groups has been a constant challenge in the Moro Region. As mentioned earlier, there are 13 ethnolinguistic groups generally divided territorially by the region’s provinces. The dominant groups are the Maguindanaoans of Maguindanao, Tausugs of Sulu, and Maranaos of Lanao del Sur.

The ratification of the BOL did not go well for the Tausugs. To pacify the then-leader of the Tausug MNLF, President Duterte held a series of meetings with Nur Misuari and stressed his desire to listen to and accommodate amendments to the BOL as necessary.<sup>291</sup> The president then designated Misuari as a Special Economic Envoy on

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<sup>287</sup> Congress of the Philippines, “An Act Providing for an Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao” (1989), [https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1989/ra\\_6734\\_1989.html](https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1989/ra_6734_1989.html).

<sup>288</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Own the People*, 74.

<sup>289</sup> Congress of the Philippines, “An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734.”

<sup>290</sup> Zea Capistrano, “BARMM Mulls Setting up Anti-Corruption Office,” *Manila Bulletin*, March 1, 2021, <https://mb.com.ph/2021/03/01/barmm-mulls-setting-up-anti-corruption-office/>.

<sup>291</sup> Sofia Tomacruz, “Sulu Rejects Bangsamoro Law,” *Rappler*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/221802-plebiscite-results-sulu-votes-against-bangsamoro-law/>.

Islamic Affairs.<sup>292</sup> In terms of representation in the regional government, 12 MNLF members occupy seats in the BTA parliament. Further, the BARMM's development programs and social services included Sulu.

The BTA establishes mechanisms to resolve intra-ethnic conflicts or clan feuds that have been affecting the peace of the Moro Region for decades. In 2019 alone, 146 clan feuds were recorded in the BARMM, which resulted in 107 deaths.<sup>293</sup> To address the problem, the BTA, through its Ministry of Public Order and Safety, has been conducting consultative dialogues in the different provinces of the region.<sup>294</sup> It is tapping the services of various Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), cause-oriented groups, security forces, and local government executives. Through such efforts, the BTA facilitated several reconciliations between warring clans.<sup>295</sup>

The GPH ensures that provisions of the peace accord are met. With an inclusive peace agreement involving the MNLF and MILF, only the BIFF and the ASG remained as the country's armed threats. In 2000, the ASG perpetuated a deadly bombing in Jolo, Sulu. Moreover, armed clashes between the BIFF and government forces occurred in 2021. However, with the BARMM, data show that conflicts decreased considerably in the past three years.<sup>296</sup>

#### *d. Normalization and Disbandment of Private Armies*

The peace agreement includes the provision for the MILF normalization process. Per records, 12,000 MILF fighters were already decommissioned, while 14,000 more are

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<sup>292</sup> Abuza and Lischin, "The Challenges Facing the Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year," 15.

<sup>293</sup> "Philippines Conflict Alert 2020 Enduring Wars," accessed March 16, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Philippines-Conflict-Alert-2020-Enduring-Wars-EN-2021.pdf>.

<sup>294</sup> "MPOS Conducts Learning Session on Rido Settlement to Bangsamoro Police Officers," BARMM Ministry of Public Order and Safety, January 27, 2021, <https://mpos.bangsamoro.gov.ph/2021/01/27/mpos-conducts-learning-session-on-rido-settlement-to-bangsamoro-police-officers/>.

<sup>295</sup> "Bangsamoro Government Leads 'Rido' Settlement in Maguindanao," Bangsamoro Information Office, June 29, 2020, <https://bangsamoro.gov.ph/news/latest-news/bangsamoro-government-leads-rido-settlement-in-maguindanao/>.

<sup>296</sup> Abuza and Lischin, "The Challenges Facing the Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year."

expected by the end of 2022.<sup>297</sup> However, only around 7,000 firearms were surrendered out of the 12,000 decommissioned fighters.<sup>298</sup> This accomplishment is still greater than the 5,000 firearms surrendered by the MNLF during their decommissioning program in the 1990s. Likewise, with the MILF program, a total of 3.3 billion pesos were released by the GPH for the transitional assistance programs and social welfare packages of the former rebels.

On the other hand, the Disbandment of Private Armed Groups (DPAGs) program is still underway. Although the 1987 constitution stipulated the disbandment of PAGs, the Office of the President directed the creation of a National Task Group (NTG) to focus on the BARMM and its adjacent territories.<sup>299</sup> As of 2017, the NTG on DPAGs reported 12 PAGs as disbanded. However, reluctance is seen on the part of the regional government in the disbanding of PAGs, since it may create tensions with the political clans.<sup>300</sup> Per PNP data, 72 of the 77 recorded PAGs in the country are found in the ARMM as of 2018.<sup>301</sup> PAGs work for politicians during elections as guns-for-hire and perpetrate other election-related violence. In the region, political clans use PAGs to keep themselves in power.<sup>302</sup>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The persistence of clans was evident from the Arroyo to the Duterte administrations. Clan elites occupied political positions in the LGUs, regional government, and even Congress. Since 2001, the contemporary presidential administrations have

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<sup>297</sup> “More than Five Thousand MILF Combatants Successfully Decommissioned This Year,” PeaceGovPH, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://peace.gov.ph/2021/12/more-than-five-thousand-milf-combatants-successfully-decommissioned-this-year/>.

<sup>298</sup> Abuza and Lischin, “The Challenges Facing the Philippines’ Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year,” 9.

<sup>299</sup> “Memorandum Circular No. 83, s. 2015,” Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, September 2, 2015, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2015/09/02/memorandum-circular-no-83-s-2015/>.

<sup>300</sup> Abuza and Lischin, “The Challenges Facing the Philippines’ Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year,” 17.

<sup>301</sup> “77 Private Armed Groups Watched Ahead of 2019 Polls -- Albayalde,” *The Manila Times*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/10/10/latest-stories/breakingnews/77-private-armed-groups-watched-ahead-of-2019-polls-albayalde/450464>.

<sup>302</sup> Acram Latiph, “Political Clientelism and Underdevelopment in Muslim Mindanao,” November 2014, 34, [https://phileconsoc.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/bangsamoro\\_latiph.pdf](https://phileconsoc.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/bangsamoro_latiph.pdf).

illustrated resilience in finding realistic solutions to attain peace by addressing the core concerns of the Moro people and the diverse interest of affected populations in Mindanao.<sup>303</sup> Although, in 2019, the GRP came up with an enhanced autonomous region accepted by the MILF, the peace process encountered setbacks along the way due to clan politics and violence.

During the Arroyo administration, clans' protest actions and blatant abuse of power contributed to the failure of the peace process. In the MOA-AD process, expansion of the ARMM territories to include Christian-dominated provinces was proposed during the peace negotiations, triggering protests by Christian political elites. Clans blocked the peace process, generating an unconstitutional ruling for the MOA-AD by the Supreme Court. Likewise, Arroyo stopped pursuing the MOA-AD, resulting in the MILF resumption of armed conflict. On the other hand, clan violence persisted during the Arroyo administration. President Arroyo used the clans to gain legitimacy as an elected president. The clans delivered Arroyo's votes to win the Presidential Elections in 2004.<sup>304</sup> In return, she tolerated the strongman leadership of the clans and even assisted other clan members in occupying regional and local government positions. Emboldened by the president's support, the clans perpetrated the Maguindanao Massacre, the most brutal act of electoral violence in the country in 2009.<sup>305</sup>

President Aquino guaranteed power-sharing mechanisms and continuous devolution of resources to the LGUs in attaining political clan support in the peace process. The Aquino administration pursued the negotiations developed during the Arroyo period and came up with the CAB. However, Aquino failed to pass the implementing legislation needed for the CAB due to the Mamasapano incident. The perpetrators of the incident were the BIFF and the private armies of a prominent political clan. The local officials of

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<sup>303</sup> Ferrer, "Forging a Peace Settlement for the Bangsamoro: Compromises and Challenges."

<sup>304</sup> Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "The Maguindanao Massacre, Perspective from Political Science," in *The Maguindanao Massacre and the Rise of Warlord Clans* (Cotabato City, Philippines: Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2010), 42.

<sup>305</sup> Ferrer, 43.

Mamasapano belong to a powerful political clan that was previously involved in the Maguindanao Massacre.

President Duterte built on decades of peace negotiations to produce the BARMM. Duterte upheld the BBL provisions on power-sharing and funding devolution mechanisms to the LGUs to ensure support from the political clans.<sup>306</sup> In 2019, the Duterte administration signed the BOL and launched the BARMM. Although the full implementation of the BARMM will be in 2025, the BTA, under the MILF leadership, is in control of the regional government. The pandemic caused delays in the MILF forces' decommissioning process. Likewise, the BTA is cautious about creating tensions with the political clans on the topic of PAGs' disarmament. Elimination of the PAGs is crucial in weakening the power source of the clans in perpetuating political and election-related violence.

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<sup>306</sup> Congress of the Philippines, "An Act Providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act 6734."

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## **V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

This thesis examines the contentious role of clan politics, a perennial spoiler of past attempts to resolve decades-old conflict in the Southern Philippines. The analysis delves into whether the clans affected the trajectory of the peace process leading to the establishment of the BARMM. The BARMM is a product of peace negotiations between the GPH and Muslim secessionist groups initiated from the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 to the launching of the BARMM in 2019. It took the GPH and the Muslim negotiating panel 43 years to develop the BARMM, a landmark deal expected to end the Muslim secessionist problem in the country. The research examines the clan dynamics in Mindanao with hypotheses focused on how negotiations creating the BARMM addressed or failed to address the critical roles of clan politics and how these political factors could shape the implementation of BARMM provisions in the future.

### **A. ANALYSIS**

The emergence of clans and the dynamics of clan politics affected the trajectories of peace negotiations attempted by the different presidential administrations. The following are the key findings of this analysis:

#### **1. The Strong Society and the Weak State**

The effects of clans and clan politics on the country's internal dynamics subsequently affected the trajectories of the autonomous region and the stability of the state. Clans' quests for power and resources were evident in elections, clan feuds, and the emergence of armed groups. The competition among clans defined the dynamics of clan politics. Weak governance opposite strong society created the imbalance, which became a fundamental driver of conflict in the Southern Philippines.

#### **2. The Clans' Origins—Historically Rooted with Strong Ideological Orientations**

The study also considers the historical roots of Muslims in Mindanao. It reflects the experiences and struggles of the clans, political elites, and kinship networks from the

different colonial periods. Muslim society in the Philippines was anchored on a deeply seated belief of aristocratic ascendancy. Lineage is an essential factor in securing a place within the ruling elite and ensures a rank of honor for the clan. Amongst Muslims, however, the Tausug were an exception and adopted a secular type of headship rather than aristocratic ascendancy. The Muslim region has 13 ethnolinguistic groups comprised of different clans. The dominant ethnic groups were the Tausug of Sulu Province, the Maguindanaoan of Maguindanao, the Yakan of Basilan, and the Maranao of Lanao del Sur. Clans compete for power and resources in the political arena, wherein political clans dominate elected positions in their respective territories to include the regional government.

Despite the varying beliefs, the challenges Muslims faced during the colonial periods framed their communal Moro identity as an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist polity. The Moros fought against the Spaniards' attempt at subjugation and Christianization. When the Philippines was eventually ceded to the U.S., mass migration of Christians to Mindanao was implemented to integrate the Muslims into the Filipino community. However, it has caused minoritization among the Muslims as Christians dominated Mindanao. This is a root cause of the sectarian divide transcending the contemporary Philippine government.

### **3. Clan Politics Play a Vital Role in the Establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao**

The research explored the significant roles of clan politics in the peace negotiations between secessionist armed groups and presidential administrations from 1965 to 2001. The Philippine presidents used political elites and their kinship networks as political machines, while clan leaders utilized patronage to sustain their clans. The spike in violent clashes in Mindanao led to the establishment of an armed entity, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The international Muslim community acknowledged the MNLF to represent Muslim Filipinos in a peace accord with the GRP. The signing of the Tripoli Agreement in Libya established the foundations of the peace process, recognizing the claims of the MNLF for autonomy under the provisions of the Philippine constitution. The

negotiations faced innumerable challenges. Ultimately, complete submission into one autonomous region was not achieved due to the constitutional process of the referendum.

Ideological issues led to the breakaway of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from the MNLF. In general, the MNLF follows secular views while the MILF pursues more Islamic beliefs. The MILF breakaway illustrated clan politics affecting the outcome of the peace process. The Tripoli Agreement was the first peace negotiation between the GPH and the MNLF, representing the Filipino Muslim community in 1976. Although the agreement was forged between the two groups, the breakaway of the Maguindanaoan MILF faction was crucial in the implementation phase. One of the leading causes of the breakaway was the leadership of Nur Misuari, a Tausug, who was challenged by Maguindanaoan elites and who followed traditional leadership ascendancy. Resolving the differences in beliefs between the Tausugs and the Maguindanaoans, as well as the accommodation of the other Muslim ethnolinguistic groups of the country, may be crucial in promoting peace in the BARMM.

#### **4. Power and Resource Sharing Among Muslim and Christian Elites**

The thesis further examined the roles of clans in the continuing peace negotiations of presidential administrations from 2001 to 2022. The peace negotiations continued between the GPH and the MILF, crafting the agreement for the Moros' right to ancestral domain and the subsequent establishment of the Bangsamoro. The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) grants Muslims the opportunity to reclaim control over the ancestral lands they lost due to the migration policy implemented from the American colonization period in the early 20th century to the post-colonization period. Politically dominant Christian families owning agri-businesses and conglomerates forcefully negated the agreement on ancestral domain. These contradictions from non-Muslim clans resulted in failed negotiations. It triggered protests led by Christian political elites until the Supreme Court rendered the MOA-AD unconstitutional.

Failures in the peace process are exacerbated by persistent election-related violence. Clans compete for power and resources, and the political arena serves as the venue. Political clans have dominated the political arena of Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (ARMM) since the 1950s. These political clans have symbiotic relationships with the central government politicians, particularly the president. Those with direct links with the president usually win elections in the ARMM. The president expects the local executives to deliver the votes that the former needs in national elections. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, for example, relied on the ARMM votes delivered by political clans to win the 2004 elections. However, this symbiotic relationship weakens the central government's control over the political clans. For example, the closeness of the Ampatuan clan to the president emboldened the former in perpetuating the brutal Maguindanao Massacre. Clan violence in the region undermines the peace process.

On the other hand, corruption has been prevalent in the region, as illustrated during the reign of political clans in the regional government. A bloated bureaucracy was observed in the regional government from 1990 to 2001. Political clans employ family and kin in the regional government and the local government units (LGUs). This practice characterizes clan tendencies to look after the welfare of their members. A downside of such a practice is the utilization of the government's coffers to support the clan. Political clans were dependent on the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) released regularly by the central government. Clans spent the funds for their own expenses and the maintenance of their private armies. Accountability of the local executives was an issue with state auditors, who were hesitant in auditing local governments due to security reasons. The region's widespread corruption resulted in higher poverty incidence, and the ARMM was rated as the country's poorest region.

## **5. The Existence of Private Armed Groups**

Clans used PAGs to perpetuate violence in their territories against other clans, especially during elections. Clan PAGs participated in killing the Philippine National Police Special Action Force (PNP SAF) during the Mamasapano Incident. The majority of the PAGs in the country are found in the ARMM. Arroyo established the Independent Commission Against Private Armies (ICAPA) to initiate the disarmament of the PAGs. However, the PAGs continue to persist, as is evident in President Aquino's creation of a National Task Force for the disbandment of the PAGs (NTF-DPAGs) in the proposed

Bangsamoro and the adjacent regions in 2015 as part of the security component of the normalization track of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). Currently, the NTF-DPAGs are still active in efforts to neutralize the remaining PAGs in the BARMM, indicating the continuous persistence of PAGs. Complete disarmament of the PAGs should weaken the clans and perhaps minimize, if not eliminate, clan violence in the region.

Inter-clan conflicts were also evident in the region during the period. The governor of Sulu has been a staunch critic of the creation of the BARMM. He believes that the proposed region will be dominated by Maguindanaoan elites, considering that the negotiation was between the GRP and the MILF, a Maguindanaoan-dominant secessionist group. He was also concerned that the regional government's enhanced autonomous powers would affect their direct access to the central government. However, research indicates that such opposition by the Sulu governor reflects a clan's insecurity over power and resources. As this study shows, the ARMM provinces depended on the internal revenue allotment (IRA) from the central government. Direct access to the central government ensures a continuous flow of funds for the provinces.

## **6. Clan Politics and the Bangsamoro Organic Law**

Clan conflicts and poor governance issues were considered in crafting the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). This analysis posits that the negotiations from 2010 to 2019 did consider the contentious role of clan politics. The concerns of the clans regarding the possible domination of Maguindanaoans in the regional government were addressed in the BARMM's adoption of a parliamentary form of government. In addition, a proportional representation voting system will be used in determining 40% of the parliamentary seats. Accordingly, this scheme reduces elitist politics.

On the other hand, the BOL included the auditing functions of the BARMM regional government. Further, the regional government is authorized to promulgate a local government code that should enable control and supervisory authority of the regional government over the LGUs. However, the central government's power-sharing and

devolution of resources to the BARMM LGUs remained. This provision is indicative of the negotiating panel's compromise with the political clans to avoid opposition to the BOL.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

The study shows that the negotiations leading to the creation of the BARMM considered the contentious role of clan politics as a spoiler in the peace process. This is evident in the stipulations of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), such as adopting a parliamentary form of government, including auditing in the regional government's function, and disarming of PAGs. The BARMM under the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) has shown positive accomplishments in the regional government, particularly in its efforts to resolve clan violence. However, the success of the BARMM depends on the sustainment of its programs as stipulated in the BOL. Importantly, failure of the central and regional governments to disarm the PAGs may result in the persistence of clan violence in the region. Likewise, failure to establish institutions that provide checks and balances and promote the accountability of local executives could result in continued poor governance and corruption. The persistence of such issues may result in the failure of the BARMM as a mechanism for ending the decades of conflict in the Southern Philippines.

## **C. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research found several implications on the roles of clans and clan politics in the success and failure of peace negotiations leading to BARMM. Based on the analysis presented here, this thesis offers the following recommendations:

### **1. Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration of PAGS**

The existence of private armies supporting clan elites poses a threat to the security landscape in Mindanao. Programs on the demobilization of armed militias will only be realized through effective disarmament of its members. While the provisions on disbanding private armed groups are incorporated in the 1987 constitution, the GRP needs to strengthen its implementing rules and guidelines, such as the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Act. A national task force could be implemented to enforce the law and limit

partisan politics. The government can also establish a database of arms and ammunition owned and used by private armed groups. All citizens with unlicensed firearms would be required to register their weapons under the state's License to Own and Possess Firearms policy. This policy would limit the arming of non-state actors.

## **2. Institutionalization of Socio-economic Strategies**

The campaign on a whole-of-nation approach from the national to local level could be prioritized. All bureaus, departments, offices, agencies, and other government instrumentalities may converge and support the aims of attaining inclusive and sustainable peace in Mindanao. It could harmonize the delivery of basic services and social development packages, especially in conflict-affected areas. The socio-economic packages shall also include MILF combatants, families, and communities. Strengthening the institutions' delivery of basic services would also strengthen the representation of the state in the region. Policies against dynastic rule may be instituted to prevent control of government by a single family, which results in abuses and violence.

## **3. Strengthen Government Institutions**

Clans' continued domination of local politics poses a threat in the governance of the BARMM. The central government could ensure the institutionalization of good governance in the region. Government institutions such as the regional Commission on Audit (COA) and the BARMM internal auditor could be established. Likewise, civil society organizations (CSOs) could be encouraged to provide checks and balances, particularly in utilizing government funds.

## **D. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research focuses on the roles of clans and clan politics on the success or failure of the presidential regimes to establish an effective peace pact with the Bangsamoro in Mindanao. From the Marcos regime to the Duterte administration, there were several attempts to establish inclusive and sustainable peace in the Southern Philippines. Other areas of important research include the role of international actors in the various peace agreements, including the BARMM. The evidence gathered in this research may expose

the respective agendas of participating international parties vis-à-vis peace accords. It may also show the extent of support that international actors extend to the private armed groups. Finally, this could provide a clearer picture of the participating parties in the peace agreements and how they facilitated peace or contributed to the protracted war.

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