

Bangsamoro identity: Its role in the Mindanao conflict and the (current) peace process

The impact of religion and ethnicity as collective and social identity

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"It's always impossible until it's done."

-Nelson Mandela-

This passage is an excellent reminder of the power of perseverance and hard work. Completing a Master's thesis while handling part-time work was a massive challenge for me as an international student. But in the end, perseverance and dedication paid off, bringing a deep sense of fulfilment and honor. This experience provided invaluable insights and taught me an important lesson in life, that is – keep pushing through the challenges, and remember that hard work and dedication can bring great rewards.

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Abstract

The Mindanao conflict in the Philippines between the national Philippine government and militant groups who represent the Moro Islamic people is one of the most enduring insurgents in Asia. The two dominant militant groups are the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and its faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), both of which initially aimed for independence from the Philippine government since the 1970s. However, acquiring independence was difficult, so both settled for autonomy, which was officially institutionalized in 2019 through the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) negotiated with the MILF (not with MNLF). One of the inclusions of the BOL is the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and the incorporation of the Bangsamoro identity to every individual in BARMM. In this thesis, the role of the Bangsamoro identity in the conflict is investigated through Social Identity Theory (SIT). In addition, the current peace-building process through BOL is assessed through examining its current situation, and its inclusions and provisions such as the Right to Self Determination (RSD) and land distribution. Employing mixed methods research by combining both descriptive (quantitative) statistics and qualitative research data from secondary sources, this thesis shows that the Mindanao conflict is strongly attributed to identity issues. Although the Mindanao conflict is a multi-faceted problem with several actors, religion and ethnicity (collective and social identities) are strong drivers with different impacts. Religion fosters nationalism, while ethnicity fosters territorial and political conflicts within the community. Thus, religion was important during the struggle for autonomy, while ethnicity plays an important role in the current peace-building process. Indeed, some clans and other militant factions (e.g., MNLF) already show discontent with the current (interim) Bangsamoro government. This implies that BARMM has to undergo re-negotiation of identity, inter-communal societal reconciliation, and trust-building for the peace-building process to advance.

Abbreviations

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AGCH	Agreement on the General Cessation of Hostilities
AGFRPT	Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of Peace Talks
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BFMP	Black Flag Movement in the Philippines
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BMILO	Bangsa Muslimin Islamic Liberation Organization
BMLO	Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
FPA	Final Peace Agreement
GAR	General Assembly of Resolution
GFAI	General Framework of the Agreement of Intent
GPH	Government of the Philippines

GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
IP	Indigenous People
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
KIM	Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MIM	Muslim Independence Movement
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NESH	National Research Ethics Committee
NICC	National Islamic Command Council
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
RSD	Right to Self Determination
SAF	Special Action Force
SHD	Sustainable Human Development
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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1 Introduction

The Mindanao conflict, also known as Moro conflict, is relatively an old (more than 50 years old) insurgent against the Philippine government. The Islamic Moro people seek freedom and/or autonomy from the tentacles of the Philippine government, causing havoc, destruction, violence and deaths in Mindanao. As to ‘why’, this Chapter provides a brief historical background including the never-ending war and peace processes (Section 1.1; details in Chapter 2). In addition, related literatures and studies regarding this Mindanao conflict are discussed, particularly their respective analyses about the main drivers and sources of such conflict (Section 1.2). The main actors of the conflict are introduced and discussed in detail, ranging from ethnic groups to dominant rebel groups (Section 1.3). Then, a research problem is constructed, which aims to understand further the Mindanao conflict by relating this to Bangsamoro identity via Social Identity Theory (Section 1.4). By understanding the impact or role of identity on the conflict, the researcher aims to provide unbiased insights and analysis, and anticipate the sustainability of the current peace process under the Bangsamoro Organic Law. In addition to the numerous published literatures and reports, this thesis contributes more knowledge, understanding and analysis that can be beneficial for the Philippines, Philippine government, Moro people and international players, as discussed in Section 1.5.

1.1 Mindanao or Moro conflict: war and peace processes

Mindanao, which is situated in the southern part of the Philippines (Figure 1), is the second-largest island of the country with six main regions. Among these six regions, Bangsamoro

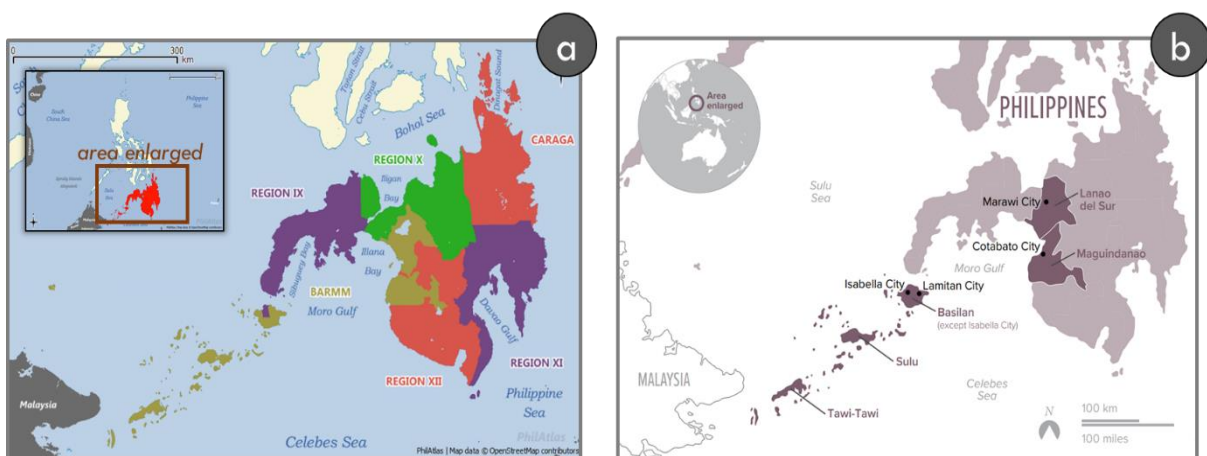


Figure 1. (a) The regions of Mindanao, Philippines including the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM, formerly known as ARMM; after 2019). (b) The provinces of BARMM (after Abuza and Lischin (2020))

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM; formerly called as Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or ARMM during 1989 – 2019) has been insurgent against the Philippine government for more than 50 years. As the name suggests, this region has attained its autonomy and was able to gain its own identity. As to how and why the region wants autonomy leads to the ongoing Mindanao's violent conflict, particularly known as the Moro conflict. The Moro conflict already started during Spanish colonialization in 1578, which was associated with the resistance by the Bangsamoro (where *bangsa* means nation) people or Moro against foreign rule and influence of Christianity. The repeated rebellions by Moros (or Bangsamoros) continued against American (i.e., supplanting Catholic Filipinos in Mindanao) and Japanese colonization programs, and up to present day. As a consequence of this continuous conflict, the BARMM region remains an Islam majority area.

The active phase of contemporary Moro conflict began in 1968 due to the *Jabidah*¹ massacre, during which 20 Muslim Filipino soldiers were killed by the soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Then, a large and determined armed Moro group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), was formed in 1972 with the aim to form an independent state or autonomous region. The former President Ferdinand Marcos implemented a martial law to suppress the rebellion. In 1976, Marcos and the MNLF signed an autonomy agreement, the Tripoli accord. However, the agreement was flawed and poorly implemented. Then civil war continued for 20 years, until another autonomy agreement was signed in 1996 with the former President Fidel V. Ramos, but again, the agreement was poorly implemented. During the 20-year active civil war, the MNLF was divided into subgroups, among them the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as a separate major armed group. The focus of MILF is on establishing an Islamic State (IS) within the Philippines and becoming an independent state. By 1999, the MILF controlled Mindanao that led to an offensive attack by the Philippine military forces. Several organizations outside Philippines are involved in peace building process. For instance, Norway has helped and supported the process and peacebuilding for the Mindanao conflict since 2001. In 2003, the MILF commenced negotiation with the government, but the conflict arose again because of losing territories. In 2007, the MILF changed their goal from becoming independent to autonomy that results to a draft peace agreement, which was rejected by the cabinet of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo

¹ The planned operation of Jabidah was to reclaim the eastern part of the Malaysian state of Sabah. This happened in the last term of former President Ferdinand Marcos.

and was considered as unconstitutional by the Philippine Supreme Court. So, hostilities recommenced with violence such as bombing and killing civilians. Until in 2011, peace talks were initiated leading to a Framework Agreement of 2012 and then to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014. However, the Moro-Philippine government peace building requires an intra-Moro reconciliation process. In particular, the MNLF tried to suspend the peace process because of its fear of losing its political power over Bangsamoro.

Then, a destructive and violent 5-month Marawi siege broke out on 23 March 2017, forcing the former President Rodrigo Duterte to implement martial law within Mindanao and the neighboring islands. The Marawi siege or Battle of Marawi was the longest urban battle in the contemporary history of Philippines between the Philippine government security forces and militants affiliated with Islamic State, the Maute group and Abu Sayyaf group (factions from the MNLF). A deadly firefight started when the Philippine government security forces tried to capture the leader of Abu Sayyaf group, who was in Marawi to meet the Maute group. Abu Sayyaf group is labeled as a terrorist group by United Nations and United States because of involvement in bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and criminal activities. After the 5-month long of battle, the leaders of both militant groups were killed. Then, the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) was signed by former President Rodrigo Duterte in the same year, after the battle, which aims to establish a political entity and allow for self-governance. The BBL, currently known as Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), was signed into law by the Philippine Congress in 2018. However, BARMM's transition to self-governance entails challenges that undermine the peace process such as the complicated intra-Moro competition among rival groups and existence of militant groups that are geographically separated (Abuza & Lischin, 2020). Apart from that, peace building between MILF and government requires trust, which is questionable and fragile based on their history.

1.2 Literature Review

The war and peace processes between Bangsamoro and the Philippine Government, as discussed in Section 1.1 are summarized in Figure 2. In the transition stage for BARMM's self-governance through BOL, there are already internal challenges that question the capability and sustainability for self-governance, which may affect the peace process. In order to mitigate the risk of hostilities, understanding and analyzing the war-and-peace cycle, the

drivers of the conflict, and the barriers of peace building are essential. There are numerous literatures such as reports and articles that qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the Moro conflict and its relation to different controlling factors. Here, some of those literatures are

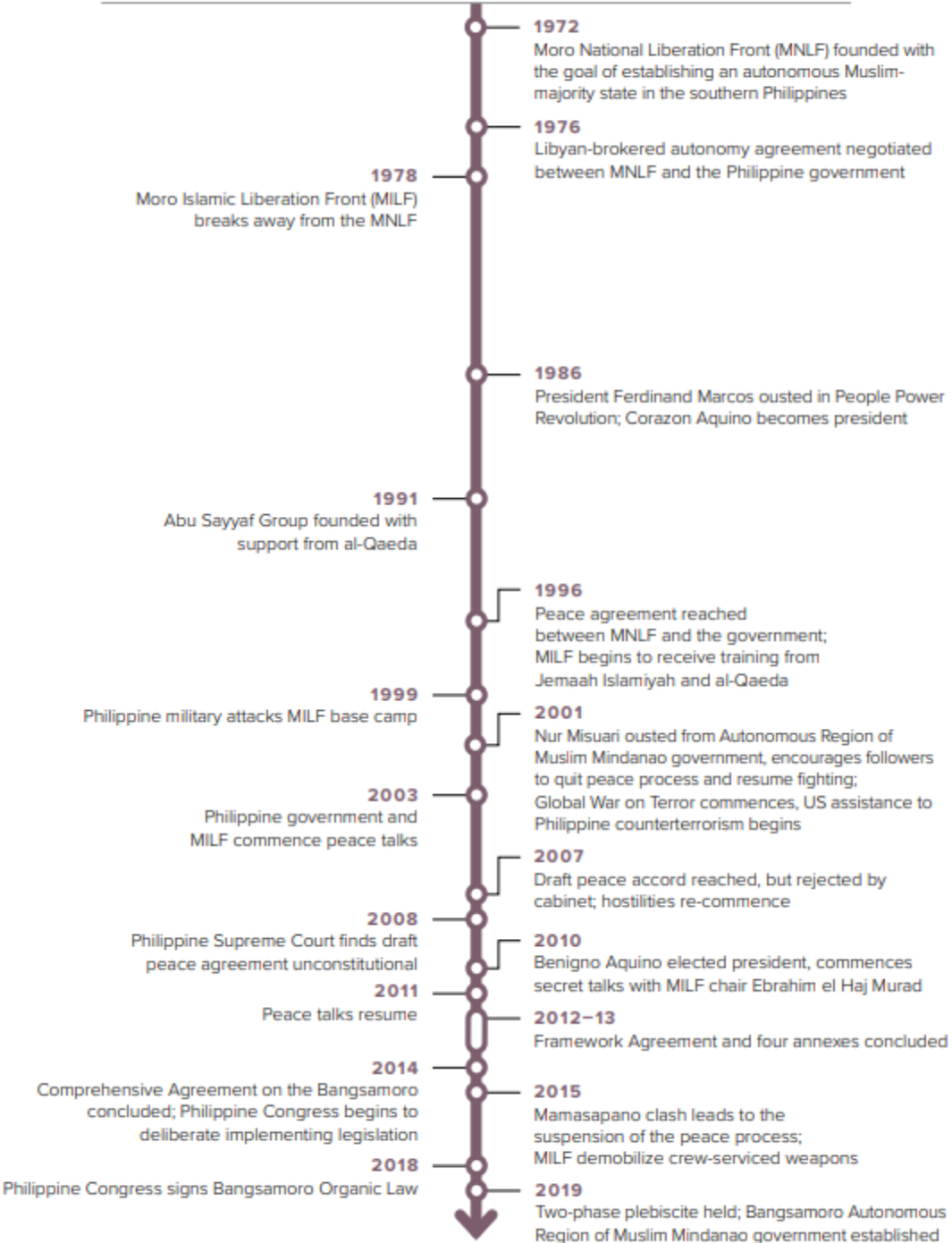


Figure 2. Timeline of the Bangsamoro conflict and peace process, after Abuza and Lischin (2020).

presented, which study the Moro conflict in-depth and address with findings and conclusion on the following sub-topics indicated in the succeeding subsections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2. These sub-topics are chosen to provide a better overview on what has been done and what can be contributed to this broad and crucial Moro conflict.

1.2.1 Complexities of the Moro conflict: actors, drivers and sources

Following the independence from United States in 1946, Moro nationalism came to rise due to numerous Christian Filipino settlers from northern Philippines who resided in the now so-called BARMM. As a response, militant groups were formed fighting against the government for independence and land ownership or territory. However, Moro conflict is multi-faceted, ranging from inter-communal and clan warfare to militant-government warfare. By analyzing and studying the active actors (i.e., clans, ethnic groups, rebel groups, criminal gangs, political elite, regional and international actors) and all the plausible drivers of conflict (i.e., territorial, political, economic, security, state services), Strachan (2015) suggests that *rido* or clan feuding is the prominent source of conflict instead of Moro insurgencies. *Rido* is inter-linked with many of the other drivers of conflict including rebel groups, and causes numerous problems in the region that can hinder peace-building. These issues include internal displacement, land disputes, loss of lives and livelihoods, destruction of property, political rivalry, drugs and crimes, and poor governance affecting economy, peace and order, education and health (Macabuac-Ferolin & Constantino, 2014; Strachan, 2015).

One of the important aspects in the resolution of civil conflict is the political transition of rebel groups, which is the current situation in BARMM under the newly replaced BOL. In the current ongoing peace process, the MILF had already decommissioned weapons. However, there was a big discrepancy between the number of firearms and the number of combatants during the first phase, which certainly raises concern to the ongoing peace process (Abuza og Lischin 2020). Does the MILF hesitant to fully commit for this peace process knowing that the government has its own history of infidelity? Or is it because the MILF cannot force its own combatants to surrender their weaponry? Although Moro insurgencies may not be the main driver of the Moro conflict according to Strachan (2015), investigating the factors for MILF's existence as the major militant group may provide better understanding about its future existence that relates to peace-building process. Recruitment into the MILF is not merely based on ideology or religion, instead it is mainly determined on the geographic

location based on the collected empirical data (Özerdem & Podder, 2012). Areas that receive great support from the Philippine government, with presence of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and with mixed populations such as Christian settlements, statistically provide less support on the MILF (i.e., Lanao del Norte; Figure 1b) compared to remote and socio-economically poor areas (i.e., Maguindanao; Figure 1b). However, the sampling of the empirical study of Özerdem and Podder (2012) is limited to selected communities such as Lanao, Cotabato and Maguindanao provinces. Since Lanao community is less supportive on the MILF, the study got few respondents from Lanao because of several factors, particularly fear. Such less support from Lanao community posts a concern to MILF's existence, transformation process during the current peace-building under BOL, and the current transition process to self-governance because MILF-civilian relationship is an important determining factor whether it is mutually enforcing, symbiotic, protective or predatory.

When the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was concluded and signed in 2014, as part of the process to institutionalize the BOL in 2018 (Figure 2), there are still collective violence that occurred. A descriptive statistical study conducted by Lara (2019) shows the transition-induced violence as part of the transition process towards self-governance, during which the Bangsamoro people may perceived the terms of political settlement as exclusionary, or favoring one identity or another, or an effect of new set of rules about normalization and reconciliation referred to as 'liberal peace'. Proper understanding of the transition-induced or resilient violence in terms of its impact on the power and resources of the local or traditional institutions (rule by strongmen – 'sultanistic') and the Bangsamoro people is necessary, which may help to manage the conflict-to-peace transition towards certainty and sustainability of the ongoing peace process by creating trust and confidence among the actors. Within the transition period, the main cause of violence is driven by economical issue, particularly the shadow economy that involves trading of illegal drugs and weapons (Figure 3a); whereas political conflict including rebellion and extremist violence and identity-based violence outweigh the shadow economy in terms of the number of conflict deaths (Figure 3b). Interestingly, rebellion-related violence has decreased during the transition, but the extremist violence has increased that is both political- and identity-related causes (Figure 4). This indicates that violence may expand as long as fronts (i.e., MILF) and clans control the provision of protection and security for Bangsamoro. For the self-governance to sustain, rebel fronts and clans are required to cooperate in fighting against

threats from extremists and identity-related conflicts (Lara, 2019; Trajano, 2020). In addition, traditional institutions have to be incorporated in the ‘peace liberal’ framework to eliminate exclusivity and create space for other identities and practices.

1.2.2 Self-determination, identity and peace process

The first peace agreement emplaced in 1972 was between the Philippine government and the MNLF, which unfortunately was flawed and poorly implemented although the region became

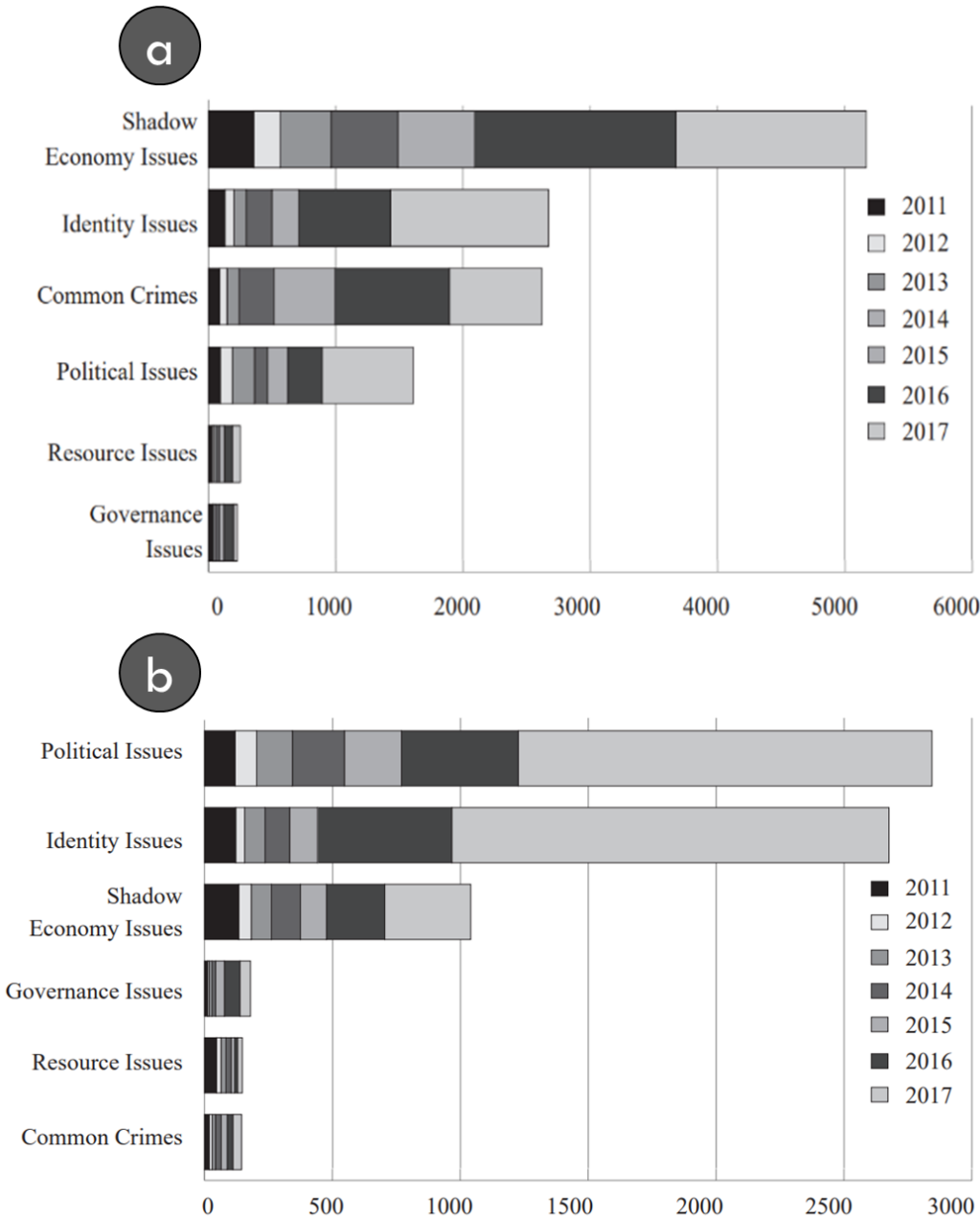


Figure 3. Main causes of (a) conflict incidents and (b) conflict deaths in ARMM from 2011 to 2017 (after Lara (2019), generated from the Conflict Alert database)

autonomous in 1989 (called as ARMM). Afterwards, a final government-MNLF peace agreement was signed in 1996. But the MNLF claimed that the implementation was a failure, thus, the MNLF is still in pursuit for a review on the agreement. The second peace agreement is between the MILF and the government, which has reached significant milestones such as institutionalizing the BOL that provides Bangsamoro people the right for self-governance and the Right to Self Determination (RSD), and renaming the region from ARMM to BARMM in 2019 to attach the Bangsamoro identity. For the MILF, the RSD aspiration hinges in the relevant human rights that protect indigenous people and cultures as stated in the International Human Rights Declaration and Covenants:

Article 1. (1) All peoples have the right to self determination. By virtue of the right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. (2) All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation, based on the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence. (3) The State Parties to the present Covenant,

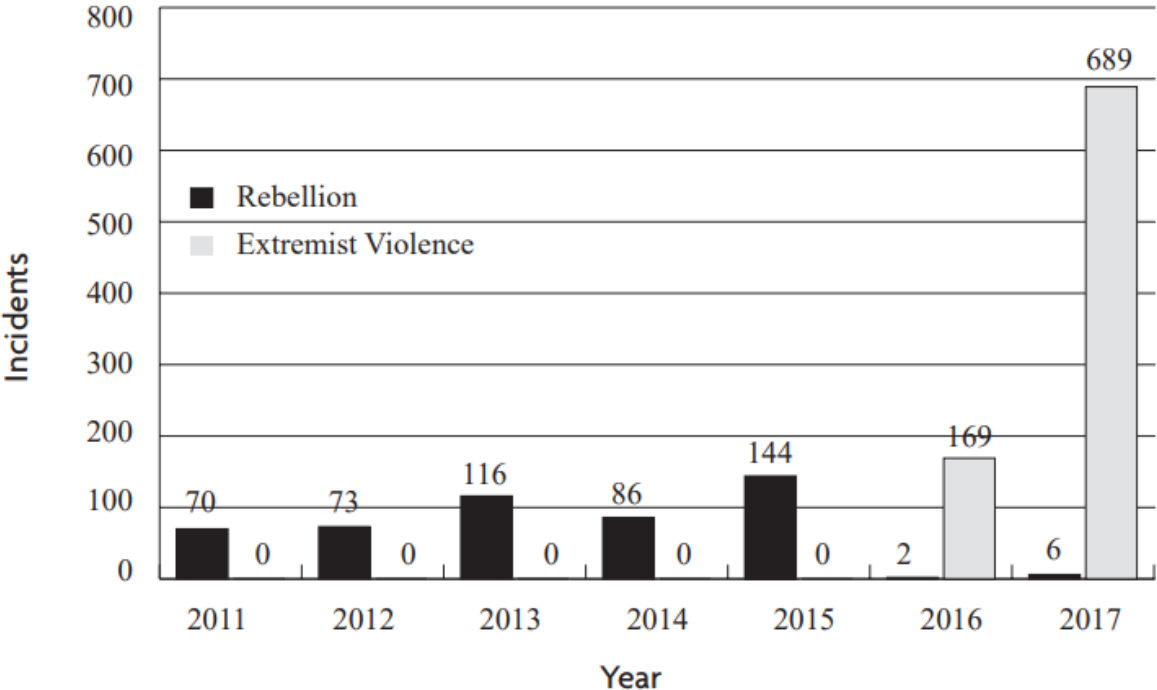


Figure 4. Rebellion and extremist violence incidence in ARMM within 2011-2017, after Lara (2019).

including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of self determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations'.²

Based on the community discussion and workshops conducted by Abubakar and Askandar (2018) with the MILF communities, RSD should also mean “as the expansion of freedoms that communities must enjoy in order for them to fully participate in their development and future”. Theoretically, the Sustainable Human Development (SHD) framework is a strategy or paradigm for achieving RSD. Thus, in a usual peace process, development is introduced as soon as the peace agreement is signed. However, with the MILF and government peace process, RSD is considered as an ends and means for development. The MILF communities perceived that the development can only be achieved and successful once RSD is addressed, and not the reverse. Therefore, they strongly affirm on the concept of independence from the government to have peace, which results in a manifestation of a strong support to the revolutionary movements like MNLF and MILF. Moreover, the ancestral domain or heritage of Moros is part of their property. Thus, they can be hesitant for any development interventions offered by the government that tend to exploit the community and resources instead of providing aid (Abubakar & Askandar, 2018).

The study of Abubakar and Askandar (2018) has limitations. In particular, most of the respondents in the workshop were from Maguindanao, who are avid MILF supporters (Özerdem & Podder, 2012). This sampling population clearly directs the results and findings into common perceptions of the MILF and its community, and not the holistic perception of Bangsamoro people. Provided that all Bangsamoro people affirm on RSD and are strongly driven by solidarity rights, potential conflicts and threats related to solidarity rights (e.g., right to peace, right to development, RSD) can be expected during the current transition for self-governance and peace process, unless the leaders always focus on people’s welfare and solidarity rights that is generally difficult to sustain.

Identity or identification is a process (Hall & Du Gay, 1996), which entails adaptation, change, and recreating what was created before based on the changing circumstances. Identity

² See Art. 1 ICCPR/ ICESCR and Art. 1 (2) UN Charter. See also Art. 20 (1) ACHPR

is also a collective characteristic of a community or a group, which excludes the unwanted and unintegrated elements. Identity is also link to access to land and its resources. In particular, the tribal genealogy is not merely for giving names to non-Christian children, but it is to sustain tribal claims and to provide leverage in bargaining for royalty and power. All definitions for identity are evident in BARMM, but in a more complex setting due to the existence of multiple ethno-linguistic and indigenous identities (e.g., Lumads), which results in a multi-faceted conflict (Strachan 2015) and indicates a diversified solidarity (Alejo 2018). Clearly, this complexity and dynamic conflict requires a non-simplified and single solution, but interlinked and multiple solutions that address each aspect or factor that causes or drives the conflict. One way to address and understand the complexity of the conflict is to investigate and analyze the role of every involving identity or actor in the conflict (Section 1.3), which is the main aim of this thesis (Section 1.4).

1.3 Analytical unit: Main actors of Mindanao conflict

The Mindanao or Moro conflict is played and affected by different actors (Section 1.3.1) who are driven by different causes or factors, mainly related to identity, political, shadow economy and common crime issues (Figure 3). This section provides a background on each of the main domestic actor and its role in the Mindanao conflict, with details in Chapter 2.

1.3.1 Main rebel groups

The MNLF is an Islamic separatist organization founded in 1972 in Malaysia that seeks autonomy for Muslim Filipinos or Moros and aims to create an independent Islamic state. The MNLF is a splinter group of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM), which was established in 1968 in response to the Jabidah Massacre. Although the MIM was supported by Malaysia through providing training and arms to Muslim Filipinos, the militant group never gained full support from the Moros and was eventually disbanded. In contrast, the MNLF had gained popularity and support from the Moros especially during the martial law. The MNLF was established by young leaders who distrusted and disliked the older and corrupt Moro elites. Upon the declaration of martial law in 1972, the scattered Moro revolts against the Philippine government escalated to war. Although the martial law had quickly dissolved the leading Moro groups, most of them had united with armed Christian Filipinos under the banner of MNLF, during which MNLF provided a steady supply of weapons from abroad. During the war against Philippine government, women played a very important role in

supporting the MNLF by providing communication, delivering supplies, weapons and information, preparing food, making uniforms, collecting financial contributions, helping in recruitment, and spreading awareness. The MNLF was a very active Islamic separatist movement until the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the MNLF and the Philippine government. The MNLF demobilized, and some of its members have integrated into the Philippine society, armed forces and politics. However, complications in the MNLF-government relationship and dissatisfaction arise because of continued difficulties in implementing the peace agreement, which results in a creation of various factions divided by aims. Since then, the strengths and influence of MNLF are weakened and exceeded by its rival rebel group, the MILF. When the MILF-government peace agreement stepped up, which mainly focused on replacing the ARMM with BARMM to incorporate the Bangsamoro identity, some of the MNLF members support the MILF-government negotiation while some strongly oppose and have pushed the government to honor the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

The MILF is a faction from the MNLF in 1977, and is the largest militant organization that seeks autonomy for the Muslim Filipino minority, the Moro people. The formation of this faction started due to ideological and political disagreements. In particular, the leader of MNLF was elected as the governor of the ARMM directly after the 1996 peace agreement, which was viewed by the majority as a personal political interest at the expense of change for the Moros. Although the MILF at its early stage did not get support from foreign states, some of its members were trained in Afghanistan where they lived and learned more extreme Islamist ideologies. This Islamic orientation aided the group in gaining support among Moros. The MILF presented itself to the Philippine government as more reasonable than the MNLF, and expressed its willingness to accept autonomy (just a scheme, since later they demanded for full dependence) while the MNLF at that time was seeking for full independence. However, the MILF was not successful and felt that the government was not taking them seriously. The MILF conducted attacks throughout Mindanao to demonstrate its strength, which not surprisingly captured the attention of the Philippine government to initiate peace talks. In 1997, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the MILF and the government, which consequently gives the MILF a full control on its territories. The MILF gained strong support in the southernmost regions because of its political strategies such as establishing a parallel government in Mindanao with a Moro-run system, offering services that the government failed to do, and engaging the Moro communities in a consultative committee

system where they discuss policy ideas at local levels. Although the MILF honored the ceasefire agreement, it was simultaneously developing its armed forces and some of its units allegedly conducted attacks. In 2000, a violent MILF activity stopped the ceasefire that led to a war against the government, which displaced several civilians. In 2001, with the new elected president, the war stopped and government policy towards MILF changed. This clearly illustrates a varying set of policy concerning MILF and Moros with the changing president. In addition, the time-frame for peace talks and peace agreements can also be affected by president's and government's priority, which in turn affects the peace-and-war cycle and evolution of militant groups. As an example, the failure of Philippine government to pass BOL as a law in 2015 created a violent conflict by newly formed factions that favor violence. Therefore, the war-and-peace cycle can be traced to the inability to reach an effective political settlement between the dominant rebel groups and the Philippine government. Until recently in 2018, BOL is finally institutionalized, which allows BARMM for self-governance and economic control. However, during this current transition of self-governance, the Philippine government already raises doubts if there will be tangible output in 2025 and that the agreement can really bring sustainable peace (Yusoph & Ali, 2022).

1.3.2 Clans and political elites

Following the 1996 peace agreement between the MNLF and the Philippine government, incidence of clan-based or group violence called *rido* have increased significantly. One of the causes is the transition of political power in overseeing ARMM from clan-based governor to MNLF-based governor. Another cause is the exclusion of some of the traditional Muslim and Christian clans in the MNLF-government agreement, which threatened their interests and needs. Such community-level violence can be escalated when both the rebels and the military take sides among fighting clans and tribes over land, resources and/or political power. As an example, the conflict between MILF and the government in 2000 occurred due to taking sides in a local Muslim-Christian conflict over a parcel of land in Lanao del Norte.

Many of the studies pointed resource-related (i.e., land) and election-related conflicts as main sources of clan-based violence, which the former is rooted to the flawed agrarian reform program in the region (Lara & Champain, 2009). The election-related conflicts are driven by local strongmen or 'bosses' or political elites who compete against their political enemies for political power to control the local economy. These political elites are commonly involved in

graft and corruption and illegal activities, i.e., illegal drug and weapon trading, kidnapping for ransom.

1.3.3 Ethno-linguistic groups: Moro, Lumad and Christian Filipino

The three main identity groups in Mindanao are Moros, Lumad and Christian Filipinos, where Muslim Moro and animist Lumad are the two main ethnic minority. Each group is diverse and has several sub-groups distinguished by culture and language. Both Moros and Lumads are significantly displaced after the World War II and independence from US by Christian Filipinos, which led to conflict over land and political control. The Moro population outnumbers the Lumads', which results in marginalizing the Lumad in peace talks and agreements. In addition, Moros are geographically concentrated while the Lumads are dispersed and commonly displaced. Despite of this exclusion, the Lumads provide their full support in the current peace process between the MILF and the government. For how long they can tolerate such discrimination depends on the Bangsamoro government. Ignoring their interests and undermining them in the current self-governance of BARMM will certainly result in legal and constitutional challenges (Paredes 2015).

1.4 Research problem

The Mindanao or Moro conflict is clearly a complex and multi-faceted issue between the government and the Bangsamoro people, internally played by different actors such as rebel groups, extremists and clans. Although most of the studies connect this conflict into identity issue, which is one of the main causes (Figure 3), the collective Moro or Bangsamoro identity is rooted from different aspects such as religion and ethnicity. To fully understand the conflict and how to have a lasting peace in Mindanao, it is important to understand and analyze the role of identity in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture and territory, which all connect to the ongoing violence conducted by factions. Thus, this thesis aims to address the following:

1. How does the Bangsamoro identity struggle play a role in the Mindanao conflict?
2. Is sustainable peace attainable in Mindanao by employing reconciliation?

1.5 Significance and limitations of the study

This thesis provides an overview and compilation of relevant and significant studies to have a thorough understanding on the Mindanao conflict. In particular, in-depth analysis of the Bangsamoro identity on the onset of the conflict is presented and linked to the different factors or aspects related to identity, especially religious identity and ethnicity. Consequently, the thesis provides insights on the pros and cons of the current peace-building, and how identity issue can fuel or dissolve the violence in Mindanao in both short- and long-term.

The thesis uses secondary information only due to limited resources (i.e., money) and time. These secondary information and datasets include published articles, books, reports and data from government and international institutions. These numerous secondary data and information, are certainly reliable for deriving conclusion and analysis, since legit websites and respectable journals are used. In addition, mixed methods research is employed in this thesis, particularly descriptive statistics and qualitative research, to make use of those vast secondary quantitative and qualitative datasets in drawing unbiased conclusions and analysis. However, including primary information or data when available can add more certainty, validity and reliability in presenting the results and discussion.

2 History of Four Centuries-long Moro Armed Resistance in Mindanao

2.1 *The arrival of Islam and Christianity in the Philippines*

Islam is the oldest religion in Philippines, which started to spread in the 14th century (Jan 1301 – Dec 1400) within the pre-colonial period. During which, Islam had spread from the southern part (Mindanao) to the northern part (Luzon) of the Philippines. With this, the Philippine archipelago was considered as part of the worldwide Muslim community or the so-called *ummah*. However, it is very important to note that during the pre-colonial period, historical accounts and archeological information were not well-documented and preserved. This indicates that we need to use a most reliable and credible source regarding the spread of Islam. To date, we can use Caesar Majul's book, entitled *Muslims in the Philippines*. According to Majul (1973), Islamic faith propagated through the Arab traders and Islamic preachers who married and/or converted the ethnic or native inhabitants.

Islam started in the island of Sulu, in the south-western archipelago of Mindanao, Philippines. In addition, Sulu is located approximately east of Malaysia. Islam started in Sulu as an expansion of Islamic religion from Malaysia for obvious geographical reason. It was believed that an Arab trader and preacher, Tuan Mashaika, started the Islam in the early 14th century by marrying the daughter of a local ruler Rajah Sipad. Within the 15th century (around 1450), the Sultanate of Sulu was established by Syed Abubakar, the first crowned Sultan, who was originated from Saudi Arabia. By this time, Sulu had served as a port for trading and commerce in Southeast Asia.

Islam had propagated rapidly in 1470s through the leadership of Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuhan in his active and efficient Islamic propagation activities. Moreover, Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuhan have initiated the development of the Maguindanao Sultanate in the early 16th century. However, the Maguindanao Sultanate did not last long. Nonetheless, Islam had spread successfully in the northern part of Philippines – the Luzon region, particularly in Manila through the leadership and cooperation of Rajah Solaiman. In the central part of the Philippines – the Visayas region, Islam had spread as well, specifically in the island of Cebu through the strong leadership of two leaders, Rajah Humabon in the mainland of Cebu and

Rajah Lapu-Lapu in the neighbouring Mactan island. Other provinces in Luzon and Visayas regions such as Batangas, Bonbon, Cagayan, Catanduanes, Laguna, Mindoro, Palawan and Pampanga had become Islam through the missionary work of Bornean preachers in the mid-16th century.

In 1492, Spain defeated the Moorish kingdom. The Moorish kingdom is mainly composed of Islamic Arabs and Berber people from northern Africa, that was advancing towards southern Europe such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, and was ruling for 800 years. The term *Moor* does not refer to an ethnic group, rather it was a term commonly used by Christian Europeans to designate and distinguish Muslim people. With the successful defeat of the Moorish kingdom, and thus putting halt on the propagation of Islam, Catholic faith was easily spread by Spanish to other parts of the world, including the Philippines.

In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese navigator, had discovered the Philippines through his very long expedition, passing through the south America and the Pacific. They reached the island of Samar, in the eastern part of Philippines (Nowell, 1962). He traded goods and supplies with the tattooed locals, and had learned about the local traditions and also the neighboring islands. Then, Magellan and his crew decided to sail inside the Visayas region to visit the different neighboring islands with different 'kings' or leaders. On their way, they met two large *balangay* warships of Rajah Kulambu of Butuan (in the northeast of Mindanao) who were in a hunting expedition. Rajah Kulambu and his brother, and another ruler Rajah Siawi, were the respected leaders in the northeastern Mindanao. These rulers welcomed Magellan and his crew, and Magellan planted a cross on the island's highest hill. Then, Magellan travelled towards Cebu, which was the largest trading port at that time. Rajah Humabon welcomed them and Magellan converted Rajah Humabon and his queen Humamay to Christianity, and also the locals (Nowell, 1962). Magellan also planted a cross on the shorelines of Cebu as sign of Christianity. Rajah Humabon, who was then renamed as King Carlos after baptism, had a blood compact with Ferdinand Magellan to seal allegiance between the Spanish and Cebuanos. Consequently, King Carlos (or Rajah Humabon) requested the Spaniards to kill Rajah Lapu-Lapu of Mactan, who was the enemy of King Carlos. Magellan and his men set off to Mactan, not to kill Rajah Lapu-Lapu though, instead to convert him and his people. However, Rajah Lapu-Lapu and his people showed resistance, thus, Magellan decided to do it by force. In the battle of Mactan, Magellan was killed by

Rajah Lapu-Lapu. Rajah Lapu-Lapu became the hero and a national symbol of resistance to colonialism. In total, there were approximately 2,200 locals in the Philippines who were baptized and converted to Christianity by Magellan. The maritime route discovered by Magellan through Pacific Ocean, was then taken by the incoming Spanish expeditions to continue spreading Christianity, with the hidden intention of exploiting the natural resources and spices.

2.2 Moros armed resistance against colonialism

The Moro people had been in a violent war with the foreign rule for approximately 430 years, during the Spanish colonial period (332 years), American colonial period (47 years), occupation of Japanese (4 years within the American colonial period), and the Philippine government (approximately 50 years). This centuries – long national liberation movement by Moro people against foreign colonialism became a culture of *jihad* (holy war), which persisted and established a war for independence against the Philippine government.

Before the arrival of Christianity, thus the Western colonizers, Islam provided meaning and direction to Muslim Filipinos. In addition, Muslim Filipinos had enjoyed independence, and a well-organized governance and political system that integrates religion and state together. The Sultans are serving as both political and religious leaders, and protector and defender of Islam. Consequently, the Islam religion was binding the people and their loyalty to the Sultan(s). The Islam religion also foster nationalism among people.

2.2.1 During the Spanish Colonialism (1565 - 1898)

In the coming of Spaniards to spread Christianity in the Philippines, only the Muslim people in Mindanao had fought hard against the conversion and for their nation. In contrast, Christianity had spread easily in Visayas and Luzon. Consequently, Muslim Filipinos became minorities in the Philippines (approximately 5% of the total population). With the continuous wars between Muslim Filipinos and Spaniards, Muslims were suffering socioeconomically because wars are always costly.

Spain had two major types of propaganda to win the war: (1) religious nationalism, and (2) name-calling. For the religious nationalism, Spaniards claimed Christianity as the true religion, making Islam as the false religion. With this, the Muslim Filipinos became more

determined to fight in the name of *jihad*, a holy war. As for the name-calling, Spaniards call the Muslims as Moros. The term *Moro*, is related to *Moor*, which connotes negative meaning and bad reputation. However, Muslims had used the term *Moro* as a unification of all Muslim people regardless of ethnicity, to form a single nation with the same ideology. This unified nation integrated with a common ideology is ready and willing to fight against any invaders who would exploit their nation, people, and natural resources. The Christianized people who were living in Mindanao, called Indios, aided the Moros in their fight against Spaniards for 300 years. This century-long conflict produced approximately 300,000 warriors who were considered as “pirates” of the seas, raiding and attacking the Christian Filipinos for slaves and booties.

The Spanish Era in the Philippines for a period of 1565 – 1898 put to an end due to the war between Spain and America, named as the Battle of Manila Bay. The fall of Manila indicates that Spain lost its control over the Philippines. Emilio Aguinaldo, who became the first Philippine President in the First Philippine Republic, returned to the Philippines in a U.S. navy ship from his exile in Hong Kong. Aguinaldo commanded the Filipino forces, who were already fighting against Spaniards (Philippine Revolution) before the Spanish-American war, to siege Manila together with American forces. The Treaty of Paris was signed in December 1898, which ended the war between Spain and America. However, this treaty also sealed a negotiation of selling the Philippines to America for 20 million dollars, which clearly indicates that the Philippines is not declared as an independent country (Magdalena, 1996).

2.2.2 During the American Colonialism (1898 – 1946)

Apart from transferring the sovereignty of the Philippines to the United States, the First Philippine Republic was not recognized in the Treaty of Paris, depriving the republic of its identity as a sovereign state (Lumbera, 2008). Thus, the Philippines became a colony of United States from 1898 to 1946, including the unconquered islands in Mindanao where the Moros and other ethnic groups resided. President McKinley said that the duty of the United States to the Philippines was “to civilize, to educate, to train for the science of self-government”. However, this duty was underestimated by the United States. For instance, changing the political system of Moro people, which is clearly different from a republican form of government, would be a big struggle. In addition, the presence of revolutionists

during the Spanish era were also a potential hindrance for attaining the goals of the United States.

Two months after the Treaty of Paris was emplaced, the Philippine-American war broke out as a continuous struggle for independence under Emilio Aguinaldo's leadership, which just lasted in 1902 (approximately two years of war) with a victory for the United States. The Philippine-American war was mainly attributed to the resistance of people in Luzon and Visayas. The Philippine – American war was short – lived because American troops were more advanced. The guerrilla tactics that the Filipino troops employed did not really match with the artillery and machine guns of American troops.

During the Philippine – American war, the United States had signed a treaty called the Kiram – Bates Treaty with the Sultanate of Sulu to prevent resistance from that part of the Philippines. The Kiram – Bates Treaty, which governed the American – Moro relations, had guaranteed autonomy for Sultanate's internal affairs and governance. The time that the United States visited the Mindanao and Sulu, the U.S. troops had regarded the Moros as wild people who were similar with the American Indians (who were brutally killed by the Westerners or Americans to conquer the now so-called United States). Although the treaty was signed, some Moros were showing resistance and opposing the Americans in a symbolic way, such as stealing horses of the Americans, taking the rifles of the soldiers, and cutting telephone wires (Magdalena, 1996).

However, when the Philippine – American war was over, the United States terminated the treaty and started to conquer Mindanao, particularly the Moro land. The U.S. troops started a punitive expedition in 1902 called the Battle of Bayang in Lanao against Moro bands or groups who resisted the occupancy of America. This was the birth of Moro Rebellion, which ended in 1913, with the victory of United States. In the Moro Rebellion, Tausug *Juramentado* warriors fought against Americans by employing suicide attacks. Suicide attacks were popular among Moros because of the overwhelming firepower of American soldiers. In this suicide attacks, Moros continued to surge towards American soldiers as they were shot several times or their flesh were ripped off by the barbed wire, just to reach and kill American soldiers, until the *jihad* of those *Juramentado* warriors stopped.

While the Moro Rebellion was ongoing, America was still able to conquer and occupy most of Mindanao because most Moros decided to cooperate in exchange for peace and their lives. In June 1903, Moro province was established, and was governed under a civil government with American officers appointed as governors. The Moro province was divided into five main districts: Davao, Cotabato, Lanao, Zamboanga, and Sulu, which are at least two-thirds of Mindanao and Sulu. This Moro province was later split into provinces and regions. The districts were subdivided into tribal wards, with major *datus* as ward chiefs and minor *datus* as deputies, judges and sheriffs. The tribal wards are only limited to Muslim communities, which is mainly based on personal ties and blood lines, and is an existing structure of Moro political system. However, the governance of Moro people was under a military regime, which ended after the Moro Rebellion war was over in 1913. In contrast, the Christian minorities in Mindanao were involved in the regular municipalities that are governed by the civilian body, the Philippine Commission. Such dual governance magnified the differences between the Moros and Christian Filipinos, which was considered by the United States as a threat to nation-building.

The occupation of United States in Moroland brought significant changes including education, commercialization of lands through agriculture and seas for trading, and infrastructures that all destroy the isolation of Mindanao from the outside world (Magdalena, 1996). This paved way for global trade but also for the incoming of Christians into the region. As for the western education, many of the slaves' children were sent to school on their own, instead of the Moro masters. As a consequence, these slave children became more educated than the old Moro elite members. As for the lands, 90 percent of the land became public domain, which was fully controlled by the government. This resulted in removing of the Moros' rights to their ancestral lands because they were not aware of the concept of legal ownership of lands by the principle of public domain. Thus, the Sultans and *Datus* lost their sovereignty and control over their territories, and judicial and taxation powers. With the economic growth of Mindanao in agriculture, there was also an increased in migration of Christian Filipinos (between 1913 – 1917) that resulted in displacing some of the Moros and tribal groups, which was not appreciated by the Moros.

Remarkably, some Moro elite members who fought in rebellion, became in favour of America's control and protection. They called themselves *Americanistas*, while those elite

members who oppose them are called *Filipinistas*. These *Filipinistas* favored for an early Philippine independence, and wanted to eject America from the Moroland. In contrast, the *Americanistas* expressed their interests to be under American protection rather than under the Christian Filipinos by sending petitions to the United States of President and the Congress. However, due to the agriculture capitalism that formed some interested group and businessmen who would prefer to retain in Moroland, some of the petitions were signed by interested Americans (Magdalena, 1996).

During the American era, the Moro-Christian conflict, which was already present during the Spanish era, was strongly developed. This can be related to the concept that was instilled in the minds of Moros that Filipinos were set to rule over them, with a Filipino governor in the Moro Province and Filipino deputies in the districts. They perceived this concept because of persistent questioning of US Representative Miller to the Moro Sultans and Datus during his visits for inspection (Magdalena, 1996). The Moros responded that they would not hesitate to cut the heads of those Filipino rulers, if the Moro Province had to run by Filipinos. While the Americans had encouraged the conflict between the Moros and Christian Filipinos, they were also showing compassion to the Moros for their release from Filipino governance. Without these cues instilled to the Moros and tribal groups, these people could have lived harmoniously together with the Christian Filipinos.

In general, the United States aimed to integrate the Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos. However, the system can never be perfect. So, mistakes had been made, including the imbalance of wealth and power between the Christian Filipinos and Moros, and the existence of parties with own personal interests or greediness that manipulated the minds of Muslims, tribes and Christians. Differences in cultural and economic achievements between the Moros and Christian Filipinos were magnified, while the ethnic distinctions were remained constant. There was a strong emphasis between the Moros and Christian Filipinos during the military governance in Moroland and also during the economic growth, which seem to foster the concept of “two nations apart” and had encouraged the Moros towards separatism.

2.2.3 After Independence: The birth of Mindanao Conflict

The inauguration of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935 worsen the conflict, where the Moros expressed their unwillingness to become Filipinos and be part of the Philippine

government. After the independence of Philippines from the American colonialism in 1946, the Philippine Republic of 1946 sent thousands of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao, to accelerate the integration of Moro into the Republic of the Philippines and development of Mindanao (Magdalena, 1996). However, this process of integration was not appreciated, and Moro's continuous resistance paved way to the so-called Mindanao conflict, a war between the Moros and the Philippine government. The Mindanao conflict was also strongly driven by the migration of large number of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao that was sponsored by the Philippine government. This migration was viewed by the Muslims as a massive transfer or stripping of land titles from Moro people. In addition, Moros proclaimed that they were marginalized and deprived by the Philippine government from different aspects such as education, health care, local investment, and justice system. This ongoing conflict was also driven by grave mistakes of the government or the president towards governance, peace process and development of Mindanao.

Between 1950s and 1970s, the Muslim identity was magnified and the self-identification as Filipino-Muslim was not appreciated because Muslim identification is next to Filipino identification. Towards the end of former President Ferdinand Marcos' term, the Mindanao conflict became worse after the *Corregidor Jabidah* massacre in 1968, during which 28 out of less than 200 recruited Muslim soldiers for *Operation Merdeka* (reclaiming of the eastern part of the Malaysian state of Sabah) were killed by the soldiers of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). These *Jabidah* commandos, who were executed, were mostly Tausugs and Sama ethnic groups from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. What was devastating for the Muslims at that time was, with all the Congressional hearings that happened, no one was arrested. Thus, it is not surprising that the *Jabidah* massacre was viewed as a set-up and a state's assault towards Muslims who offered their services to the Republic, but then murdered by Christians who were under the state's protection. This infamous tragedy led to the formation of Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) under the leadership of Datu Udtog Matalam, the Governor of Cotabato province, which called for secession and emphasized the Muslim-Christian conflict. But, the idea of secession of Matalam did not push through when President Marcos designated him as the Presidential Adviser on Muslim Affairs (Buendia, 2005).

In 1971, the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) was formed by the House of Representatives, Raschid Lucman, to continue the idea of Matalam. Later, the group was

renamed as Bangsa Muslim Islamic Liberation Organization (BMILO) in 1984 because Moro term is unacceptable by most of the Muslims. However, the BMILO did not last long as an alternative to MIM because of its corrupt and power-grabber leaders (mostly Muslim politicians and traditional Muslim elites) who tried to negotiate with the President Marcos for political autonomy. The younger and more militant BMILO members considered this as a betrayal and submission to the state. Thus, under the leadership of young intellectuals, Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim, both established the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF; details in Section 2.4) in 1972. On this year, President Marcos declared Martial Law to deal with the threats from Muslim separatists and communists. Misuari recognized that the failure of Moro Rebellion against the United States was partly because of the collaboration of Muslim leaders with the state. Thereby, Misuari started a rebellion with two main goals: (1) to have an independent homeland with 13 ethno-linguistic Muslim groups, and (2) to conduct a war against the aristocratic and Muslim traditional politicians and leaders (Buendia, 2005). It is clear that the separatist concept of Misuari is towards secular orientation, not Islamic. His goal was to reclaim the Bangsa Moro (Moro nation), and declared that the identity of Muslim people is not Filipino-Muslims, but instead, Moros. He transformed the term Moro as a nationalistic and unifying identity of Muslim people living in the Moro land, who are continuously resisting against the Philippine Republic.

However, within this militant group, internal conflict also occurred because of different ideologies and aims. This results in formation of different factions, particularly into four main Moro factions that all aim for self-determination, but in different forms. The first faction formed in 1977 was the New MNLF group led by Salamat Hashim, a Maguindanaoan. The New MNLF faction was formed a year after the MNLF signed an agreement with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines GRP-MNLF Tripoli Agreement. The New MNLF advocated for autonomy instead of independence, to project that the New MNLF group is easier to negotiate with compared to the MNLF. However, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) continued to support the MNLF. In 1983, the New MNLF changed its name into Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The second split occurred in 1991, two years after the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). This group is called the Abu Sayyaf (sword bearer) Group (ASG), led by Abdurajak Janjalani. The ASG advocated for a purely Islamic government

through Jihad-Fi-Sabil-lillah (Islamic war) to end “oppression, injustice, capricious ambitions, and arbitrary claims impose on the Muslims” (Buendia, 2005). Like the MILF, the ASG group was also against the collaboration of MNLF with the Philippine government. However, the ASG is more radical than the MILF, which made them more brutal and violent such as taking hostage and kidnapping for ransom, beheadings, robberies, and other violent gestures towards Muslim and Christians. The ASG is labelled as a terrorist group by the United States. For MNLF and MILF, the ASG is a dismay.

The third split happened in 1995, before the conclusion of the 1996 peace accord between the GRP and MNLF. This third faction is known as the National Islamic Command Council (NICC), led by Melham Alam, the former chief of staff of Misuari. Alam announced in a press conference in March 2000 that the guerrilla war against the Philippine government would continue and that they would establish an independent Islamic state in Mindanao through mutual destruction. The group was staging terrorist attacks against Christian and Muslim civilians.

The fourth faction called the “Council of 15” was established seven months before the ARMM election in November 2001. The “Council of 15” declared that Misuari is incompetent to remain as the chairman of the MNLF, and that the “Council of 15” is the legitimate Central Committee of the MNLF. Misuari was overthrown as a Governor of ARMM and was charged with corruption and treason.

In 2005, another group was formed. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) called the group as “Misuari Breakaway Group” or “MNLF renegades”, and claimed that the group demanded a fair trial for Misuari. However, the spokesperson of this group said that the AFPs killings in Sulu triggered the formation of such group.

In 2010, an MILF faction called the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) under the command of Ameril Umbra Kato was formed, because the MILF abandoned its demand for independence. Prior to the formation of BIFF, Kato led a forceful campaign without the authorization of MILF, which made him expelled from the MILF. The campaign that Kato initiated was targeting non-Muslim civilians by raiding them that resulted in the destruction of property and the amputation of civilians. Kato initiated these attacks as a response to the

decision of the Philippine Supreme Court on the MOA-AD as unconstitutional (Mapping Militant Groups, August 2018).

The constant division of Moro movement indicates that it is difficult and challenging for the Muslim minorities in Mindanao to unite under one identity and one banner. Apart from this, when a militant group (i.e., MILF) attempted to negotiate with the Philippine government, and it was rejected, hostilities would re-occur. Thus, the conflict in Mindanao still goes on.

2.3 The Peace Processes for the Mindanao Conflict: A Quest for the Moro Right to Self-Determination

In 1970s, Misuari's goal to implement Moro identity and to reclaim the Moro land were not successful. However, this notion of nationhood and creating a Bangsa Moro was left in the hearts and minds of Moro people. The MNLF collaborated with the Philippine government in 1976 by signing the Tripoli Agreement in Libya. In that agreement, the MNLF's demand shifted from independence to self-determination. In 1987, the GRP and the MNLF signed the Jeddah Accord to discuss the proposal for autonomy to a Muslim region and the inclusion of the 13 provinces identified in the Tripoli Agreement. In 1989, the former President Corazon Aquino signed the Republic Act No. 6734, which provides an Organic Act for the Creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Of all the 13 provinces listed in the Tripoli Agreement, only Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur voted for inclusion. In 1996, the GRP and the MNLF signed the Final Peace Agreement, which granted autonomy to Muslim dominated areas, and the MNLF Chairman Misuari was appointed as the ARMM governor.

When the MNLF started to collaborate with the Philippine government, the MILF became the most powerful militant group, which is advancing the Moro separatist movement and the concept of Moro nation. With this, the government acknowledged that the MILF can be a threat to a peace process. So, the former President Fidel V. Ramos brought the MILF in a negotiation table in July 1997, and both signed the GRP-MILF Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities (AGCH). This agreement was a start for peace negotiations with the MILF. However, this was not fruitful, and this became worse when the former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada called for "All Out War" policy against the MILF in April 2000. This

war displaced one million people. He also disregarded the 1998 General Framework of the Agreement of Intent (GFAI) between the MILF and GRP.

The negotiation between the MILF and GRP resumed in 2001 under the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Both the MILF and GRP signed the Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of Peace Talks (AGFRPT). In the same year, President Arroyo signed the Republic Act No. 9054, which expanded the area coverage of ARMM, in which the Basilan and the Islamic City of Marawi decided to be part of the region. In addition, the Tripoli Agreement of Peace of 2001 was also held in the same year, but not was fruitful because it was merely talks, not discussing the agenda for the agreement about security, rehabilitation and ancestral domain. Similarly, the GRP-MILF Peace Talks in 2003 was also not fruitful. Generally, the peace talks were volatile and not concrete, and mostly about ceasefire agreements. This clearly raise a question that this peace talks were just about what the government wants, and not the wants and needs of the Muslim people.

The Philippine state's main agenda is the preservation of its political and territorial jurisdictions. In contrast, the MILF's main agenda was the independence of Moro people and the rights for ancestral domain. The MILF Chairman Hashim believed that the GRP-MNLF agreement was able to solve the government's problem, not the Bangsamoro problem, which is about the illegal and immoral intrusion of Moros' ancestral homeland and deprivation of rights to freedom and self-determination (Buendia, 2005). However, the Right to Self-Determination is a complex concept, which ties to territories and nationhood. In addition, it is crucial and may have contradicting meanings and views when looking at international literatures because of different experiences and conditions. Historically, the Right to Self-Determination concept in the Philippines can be mainly linked to territorial rights. In ancient times, this land issue can be solved in the battle field. However, in the contemporary times, national and international laws have to be applied.

In 2008, the GRP-MILF secretly signed the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in Malaysia. This agreement aimed to expand the boundaries of the ARMM established in 1996 peace agreement, with the long-term objective of completely replacing the ARMM. The MOA-AD aimed to facilitate increased autonomy for the Moro regions and establish a system of power-sharing among the involved parties. However, the

MOA-AD was considered unconstitutional by The Supreme Court because it entails the creation of a Bangsamoro Judicial Entity with its own military, police and judicial systems. In 2010, the MILF's demand shifted to autonomy from independence, thus the BIFF faction was formed (Ramos & Alhambra, 2018).

In 2011, the former President Benigno Aquino III had a personal meeting with the MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ibrahim in Tokyo. Then, in October 2012, the Government of the Philippines (GPH, formerly called GRP) and the MILF signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), which was the roadmap for the creation of Bangsamoro, the new self-governing region. To follow up this, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was formed in December 2012 to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which is then renamed to Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

The final piece of the final peace agreement, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was successfully signed in 2014. In the same year, the BTC and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) had submitted the first draft for the BBL. However, in 2015, the MILF's involvement in the blood-bath between the Special Action Force (SAF) troopers and BIFF fighters raised questions about the MILF's intention and loyalty. This slowed down the peace process and could have resulted in the failure to submit the BBL in 2016. However, former President Rodrigo Duterte expanded the BTC in 2016 with six additional member representing indigenous peoples, local government, sultanates and other groups. In 2017, Marawi siege occurred, which was initially an operation to hunt down the leader of ASG. But the operation became a violent war between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Maute groups. This urged President Duterte to certify the proposed BBL and the Congress approved their respective versions. On 27 July 2018, President Duterte signed the Republic Act No. 1154, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) (Ramos & Alhambra, 2018). By then, an interim Bangsamoro government was emplaced with an appointed Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim. With this BOL, the ARMM was replaced with BARMM. In addition, decommissioning has done, where the MILF members have to disarm and surrender their weapons. The first parliamentary elections in the BARMM were postponed by the Former President Rodrigo Duterte from 2022 to 2025 to synchronize with the national elections. The BARMM is an example of a federal government, which is delegated with governmental powers as well as resources, and has the capacity to create new

offices and agencies, while affirming the national laws and Constitutions (Ramos & Alhambra, 2018).

2.4 The prominent militant groups and factions

This section provides a more detailed insight as to how the different militant groups and factions who are engaged in the Mindanao conflict were formed, what their ideologies are, where they operate as well as their role in the conflict and peace process.

There are a number of rebel groups operating in Mindanao. Some of these groups are huge like the MNLF and the MILF, while some are minor factions such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). A large number of very small groups are coming out in support of Islamic State (IS), which is based in the Middle East. Many of these groups are said to have sworn loyalty to Al Qaeda in the past (Strachan, 2015). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that acquiring precise information regarding numerous groups, their affiliations, and their undertakings continues to pose challenges.

2.4.1 The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is a well-known Islamic secessionist group that was formed in 1972, which aimed to establish a self-governing region or independent Islamic state for the Moro people. From the 1970s to approximately two decades thereafter, the MNLF emerged as the preeminent entity within the Moro separatist movement (Santos & Santos, 2010). The group operates in Mindanao and is still presently active. Historically, the MNLF is a faction that originated from the MIM (as discussed in Section 2.2.3), which was founded in May 1968 in response to the *Jabidah* Massacre. In this terrible incident, Moro Muslims who had received military training in preparation for an imminent military operation were killed by the AFP (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019).

Nur Misuari, the Chairman of MNLF, planned to change the way how power was shared in the Moro community, which was based on the idea of an equal society. Initially, the MNLF endeavoured to align itself with the global Muslim community, known as the *ummah*, and established a significant groundwork for the Moro aspiration. Consequently, the project of MNLF was able to depend on the longstanding social structures that have historically supported the practise of Islam. The source of MNLF's power primarily derived from two

interlinked objectives: (1) the promotion of Islamization, and (2) the achievement of social justice. Islam served as the cohesive element in shaping the social identity of the Moro people. Thereby, the diverse Muslim ethno-linguistic groups were able to achieve a certain degree of unity under the leadership of the MNLF despite the fact that the Moros were characterised by their division into separate ethnic groups (Maranao, Maguindanao, and Tausug communities). However, this different ethnicity is also not surprising to cause formation of factions and split support and loyalty. For instance, the MNLF is led by a Tausug while the MILF (in Section 2.4.2) is led by a Maguindanaoan. In addition, the Moros comprise of a demographic that encompasses both educated young individuals who have received education within their local communities, as well as individuals who identify as Islamic radicals and have undergone training and education from external sources. As a result, this diversity in both ideologies and ethnicity impeded the advancement of Muslim unity in its subsequent interactions with the Philippine government (David, 2003).

The MNLF initiated its first assault on 21 October 1972 on multiple locations within Marawi City, which encompassed the Philippine Constabulary, a government-operated radio station, and a state university. The exact number of casualties in terms of fatalities and injuries remains undisclosed. During an interview conducted in 1974, a commander affiliated with the MNLF outlined three key factors that contributed to the establishment of the MNLF. These factors were identified as (1) the *Jabidah* Massacre, (2) instances of land grabbing, and (3) the disillusionment experienced by the general populace due to the government's inability to effectively address social, political, and particularly economic challenges. Certain leaders within the MNLF expressed sympathy towards the organisation due to its emphasis on fostering a sense of national identity. These leaders perceived the *Jabidah* Massacre incident as having a unifying and mobilising impact (David, 2003).

Despite the eventual acceptance of an autonomy agreement by the leadership of the MNLF as outlined in the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, it is worth noting that the initial aspiration of the MNLF was to establish a fully independent state for the Moros. This clearly demonstrates that the objectives of the MNLF are fragmented. Thus, it is not surprising that MNLF is also fragmented into different factions with different intentions and ideologies. Some factions have expressed support for the peace agreement between the MILF and the Philippine government, including the BOL. Whereas, other factions have expressed dissent and emphasised the

necessity of fully implementing the 1996 agreement (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). Its last attack was reported on 9 September 2013 when members of the MNLF led by Nur Misuari (the founding chairman of the MNLF) launched an assault in Zamboanga City, engaging in hostilities against government forces and subsequently seizing approximately 300 civilians as captives. The duration of the conflict extended until 28 September 2013, resulting in a total of 6 or more casualties and 24 individuals sustaining injuries (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019).

2.4.2 The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

In the 1970s, the MNLF split into two groups. One of which became the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which was initially called the New MNLF. The MILF (or New MNLF) was founded by Hashim Salamat, a co-founder of MNLF together with Nur Misuari. However, these two leaders had different political and ideological views. Salamat said that Misuari's desire for freedom for the Moro was not in line with real Islamic goals. In December 1977, Salamat led a group of MNLF members who wanted to take the power away from Misuari, and broke all ties with the original MNLF. The MILF primarily operates in central Mindanao and holds the distinction of being the largest and most powerful militant group in the region (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019). The MILF aims to establish an autonomous and Islamic state for the Muslim population residing in Mindanao. The MILF was initially characterised by its explicit adherence to Islamic principles, which stands in contrast to the MNLF that is more inclined into secular orientation. A significant number of the early leaders of the MILF had pursued their education at universities known for their conservative ideologies in predominantly Muslim nations. Particularly, Salamat obtained his education at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. In addition, members of the MILF underwent training within military facilities situated in the Middle Eastern region.

During the 1980s, the MILF devised a strategic approach aimed at the gradual establishment of an Islamic society within the Moro regions. In order to achieve its objectives, the MILF implemented Islamic law within the territories it governed, with the expectation that the establishment of an autonomous Moro state would succeed in due course (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019). The initial assault launched by the MILF occurred on 7 September 1986. The MILF agents detonated a grenade inside a Catholic Church in Salvador,

Philippines during a wedding. A total of 10 individuals were fatally injured and 90 individuals sustained injuries.

The peace agreement between the Philippines and the MNLF in 1996 led to the extension and change of the ARMM, which was not well appreciated by most of the Moro people. As a result, this 1996 agreement made the MILF popular and influential in ARMM. Remarkably, Nur Misuari was appointed immediately as the governor of ARMM with the support of the government. This created a perception among the MNLF members that the deal and the election after the agreement was signed were more about Misuari's personal goals rather than making big changes for the Moro people. Thus, this creates further dissociation of MNLF. A large number of MNLF members were integrated into the government and social system of Philippines, while some members left to join the MILF. Disappointment with the MNLF pushed the MILF to work harder at recruiting, making the MILF bigger and stronger than the MNLF both in size and ability to do things. So, the MILF became the main group of militants fighting for the rights of the Moro people. (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019)

Following the death of Salamat in 2003, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim assumed leadership of the MILF. Ebrahim is widely regarded as a comparatively moderate individual in comparison to Salamat. During his tenure, notable advancements have been achieved in the peace process. In the year 2008, the Philippine government and the MILF entered into a secret agreement known as the MOA-AD (Section 2.3). However, this was considered as unconstitutional by The Supreme Court because of its aim to create a Bangsamoro Judicial Entity with its own military, police and judicial systems. As expected, public outcry and opposition from the MNLF occurred. The MNLF contended that their 1996 agreement with the government was final (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019).

In general, the MILF strives to attain significant self-determination for the Muslim population in the Philippines. The MILF has occasionally demonstrated a willingness to consider the possibility of granting autonomy to the Moro regions, as opposed to pursuing complete independence. This inclination was particularly evident during the early stages of the organization's existence and has resurfaced in recent years. In the year 2010, the group formally renounced its request for complete sovereignty and instead embraced the concept of regional self-governance (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019). The MILF proved

that it had the right to lead the Moro people by emphasising its adherence to Islamic values and getting support from the people. The MILF worked hard to create an independent Islamic state in the areas it controlled by making sure people followed Islamic law. In general, the MILF got a lot of support because of how well they worked with the local people, used government resources, and believed in the Islamic faith (Mapping Militant Organizations, January 2019).

When President Benigno Aquino III took office in 2010, peace talks to get rid of the ARMM moved fast, which has gotten a lot of bad press. The MNLF was pushed to the side during talks between the Philippine government and the MILF. Since the MILF gave up on its goal of total independence and said it wanted regional authority instead, the FAB was signed in 2012 by the Philippine government and the MILF, and followed by CAB in 2014 (Section 2.3). The final assault by the MILF happened on 17 April 2017, during which the MILF claimed responsibility for orchestrating two coordinated attacks in Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. A law enforcement officer, who was responding to a prior explosion, became the intended recipient of the second explosive device that detonated in close proximity to a petrol station. There were no fatalities, although a total of 5 civilians and 9 police officers sustained injuries. Although the assault in 2017 occurred, BOL was institutionalized in 2018 after the Marawi siege (Section 2.3).

2.4.3 The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), also known as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM), emerged in 2010 under the leadership of Ameril Umbra Kato. The BIFF originated as a breakaway faction from the MILF because the MILF shifted its goal from independence to autonomy.

Kato possessed a comprehensive understanding of Islam through his academic pursuits in Saudi Arabia, and he actively participated as a member of the MNLF then joined in the MILF in 1980s. In due course, Kato ascended to the position of chief within the 105th Base Command of the MILF. Kato embraced a radical interpretation of Islam, held a deep admiration for Wahhabism, and consistently advocated for the establishment of a sovereign Islamic state. This stance remained unchanged even as the MILF gradually shifted its position towards seeking autonomy rather than complete independence. In 2008, a notable divergence

emerged between Kato and the leadership of the MILF. Kato spearheaded a group for a forceful campaign that targeted non-Muslim communities. The group of Kato engaged in a series of raids, resulting in the destruction of property and the decapitation of civilians over a duration of six months. Kato initiated these attacks as a response to a verdict by the Philippine Supreme Court, which deemed the peace agreement between the MILF and the Philippine government as unconstitutional. These actions subsequently triggered a severe retaliatory response from the Philippine military, leading to the displacement of more than half a million individuals. However, the operations carried out by Kato's forces were unauthorised by the leadership of the MILF. Consequently, the MILF took action by demoting Kato and dissociating MILF from the violent attacks.

The initial assault carried out by the BIFF group happened on 5 August 2012, during which members of the BIFF initiated a series of attacks on eleven towns situated in the province of Maguindanao. These attacks were primarily directed towards military installations and personnel belonging to the AFP. The conflict between the BIFF and the AFP resulted in 3 fatalities and 1 or more individuals sustaining injuries. The most recent (suspected) attack of BIFF was on 25 December 2017, when they launched an assault on a military unit stationed in Maitemaig, located in the Datu Unsay district of Maguindanao, Philippines. The attack killed 10 individuals and injured 5 individuals. (Mapping Militant Groups, August 2018)

2.4.4 The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is classified as a terrorist organisation or criminal entity by the United States and United Nations. The ASG is primarily active within the province of Basilan, where it maintains its bases of operation. It is widely believed that the primary location of the group's headquarters is in Sulu, where there is a notable presence of ASG activities in the Jolo and Patikul regions. The emergence of the ASG as an alternative for the existing MNLF and MILF can be attributed to the persistent political and economic inequality between the Moros and other Filipinos. Despite the efforts made by the MNLF and MILF, this inequality has remained, thereby strengthening the ASG's position as an alternative organisation. The ASG capitalised on the unfavourable economic conditions prevailing in the Philippines during that period, thereby enabling the group to attract individuals with limited economic prospects as new recruits. (Mapping Militant Groups, February 2022)

The ASG was founded by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani in 1991, who was formerly affiliated with the MNLF. Janjalani studied in the Middle East with the sponsorship of an extremist group known as the Islamic Tabligh, and was greatly influenced by the extremist group's ideology. After he came back to the Philippines for good, Janjalani proceeded enlisting discontented members of the MNLF, ultimately forming what is now known as the Abu Sayyaf Group. During the 1990s, the ASG became known for using violence. They bombed, kidnapped, killed, and carried out other violent activities, with the focus on Christians and outsiders. The ASG also went after the Philippine military, which was in line with the group's stated goal of fighting against the Philippine government and making a separate Moro state. (Mapping Militant Groups, February 2022)

After Janjalani was killed by the Philippine law enforcement in a fatal encounter in 1998, the ASG underwent a division, resulting in the formation of two distinct groups. One group was led by Galib Andang, a commander, and the second group was led by Khadaffy Janjalani, the late ASG founder's brother. The second group remained as an ASG. The ASG was forced to switch from terrorist acts to kidnappings because of internal division and a decline in discipline, as well as the lack of support from Al Qaeda. These kidnappings were carried out especially to collect ransom payments, which were essential to the group's financial existence. The ASG kidnapped twenty-one persons from a Malaysian resort in 2000, when it carried out its first international strike (Mapping Militant Groups, February 2022).

The Philippine government does not view the ASG as a legitimate group for engaging in a peace agreement, instead they are regarded as the most extremist and least influential among the Islamic separatist organisation in the country. There has also been a notable absence of willingness on their part in holding peace negotiations with the Philippine government due to the group's preference of establishing an autonomous state through armed resistance as opposed to diplomacy. The ASG has attempted to undermine the most recent iteration of peace negotiations between the government and the MILF by carrying out attacks aimed at destabilising ceasefire agreements and discouraging the continuation of dialogue. In July 2014, a tragic incident occurred in the island of Jolo, where the ASG killed at least 21 Muslims who were partaking in festivities that marked the conclusion of Ramadan. This act of

violence was purportedly carried out as a retaliatory measure due to the victims' perceived endorsement of the peace process. (Mapping Militant Groups, February 2022)

2.4.5 The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)

The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is an extremist Islamist organisation that is actively engaged in acts of terrorism within the Southeast Asian region. The JI was founded in the late 1980s to early 1990s, implying that the group formed gradually. In the late 1980s, Yemeni-born Indonesian preachers Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir fled to Malaysia to avoid prison and created the organisation. Their primary objective was to facilitate the journey of Southeast Asian Muslims to Afghanistan, enabling them to participate in the resistance against the Soviet Union and receive training in that region. A considerable number of individuals associated with JI underwent training in Afghanistan during the period spanning the early to mid-1990s. Alongside its training, JI purportedly obtained resources and guidance from Al Qaeda during its developmental phase.

During the 1990s, JI successfully established its operational presence in both the Philippines and Indonesia. During the mid-1990s, Sungkar successfully established training camps in the Philippines, thereby fostering a robust association between the JI and the MILF. On 3 May 2015, Basit Usman, the leader of JI Philippines, also referred to as Ansar Khalifah Sarangani, met his demise at the hands of the MILF. There are reports indicating that certain individuals within the group continue to engage in activities and have posited a connection between a faction known as Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao (KIM) and a selection of the aforementioned entities. The group is widely recognised as the primary driving force behind the Black Flag Movement in the Philippines (BFMP), a movement that is said to hold ISIS in high regard. The organisation has exhibited a period of relative inactivity in recent years; however, its continued status as a threat is attributed to its associations with Al Qaeda and various other affiliated entities (Strachan, 2015).

3 Theories on Identity and Reconciliation

In the “Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundation and Dynamics” by Bar-Tal (2013), conflict is defined as “*situations in which two or more parties perceive that their goals and/or interests are in direct contradiction with one another and decide to act on the basis of this perception.*” According to this description, conflict would arise when there is contradiction with one another’s opinions or interests, and the individuals involved take action in response to their contrasting point of views. Therefore, it is necessary that at least one party decides to act upon this contradiction and bring it into the light, at least in a vocal statement, for a conflict to arise. Recognizing the discrepancies in aims and/or interests between each party is definitely not enough for the conflict to start. Taking action is the main ingredient for the birth of conflict. This means that a conflict can arise even when, in the first stage, only one party decides to act because the party believes that its goals and/or interests are different with those of the opposing party. If a similar action would be taken by the opposing side, which also recognizes the contrasting interests, the conflict would escalate further.

Every level of human interaction involves conflict. This conflict can be attributed to an interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, interorganizational, intra-societal, inter-ethnic, international or even inter-civilizational level, which are just a few of the most prominent levels that can be classified as micro and/or mega conflicts (Galtung, 2004). These different levels of conflict occur regularly and frequently because every individual is unique. Thus, people cannot perfectly agree on everything, including aims, interests, values, and/or views. One or majority has to compromise to have peace and unity. Therefore, it is expected that conflicts occur between people, whether as individuals or groups, who have different ways of thinking, cultural environments, political and economic systems, aspirations, values, goals, and needs (Bar-Tal, 2013). But, what part of an individual, when triggered, can cause a conflict?

Identity, which is commonly an individual perception, is a crucial, delicate and complex matter. For instance, when a kid called or labelled another kid with something horrible that cannot be appreciated, usually they end up fighting. Thereby, it is not surprising that conflict and identity are interlinked and/or correlated. In the article of Smyth (2002) entitled “Identity-Based Conflicts: A Systematic Approach”, he states that

“Some of the most difficult conflicts of all are those grounded in identity, which can be analyzed in both personal and societal contexts.”

This difficulty in handling and solving identity-based conflicts are also expressed by Lara and Franco (2022), particularly in Mindanao, Philippines, where they stated that:

“To understand the relationship between identity and conflict, the foundation of identity must be explained.”

In most, if not all, identity- and conflict-related literatures and books cannot provide an exact and simple answer or solution for conflicts. This is because conflicts are attributed to different levels or sources and involved individuals who are by nature a complex entity. If the conflict is identity driven, identity can evolve with time and individuals can adapt or change in response to the circumstances. As for the Mindanao conflict, which is generally presumed an identity-driven conflict, this chapter provides the theories related to identity that would help to explain the ongoing Mindanao conflict. In particular, religious and ethnic identities are discussed and explained as to how these identities can trigger conflicts (Section 3.1). Then, the established concept(s) about reconciliation as a peacebuilding process is discussed to understand its effectivity and may help in anticipating its sustainability (Section 3.2). Presenting these concepts about identity, conflict, and peacebuilding in this chapter would certainly aid in answering the research questions posed in this thesis (Section 1.4).

3.1 Identity and conflict

Numerous philosophical perspectives have been used to examine the concept of identity, which has been the subject of substantial research. A social identity approach is commonly utilized to understand peace and conflict. This approach is highly relevant in today's world, where differences in cultural, religious, ethnic, political, and national affiliations are considered and linked as roots for majority of the conflicts (e.g., wars, genocide). This social identity-based conflicts can affect everyone's life and thoughts because of strong attachment to groups or affiliations.

The term *identity* is a very broad concept that many different scholars and theorists have tried to study and explain. The term *identity* tends to mean “too much (then understood in a strong sense), too little (then understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Despite the ambiguous meaning of *identity*, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have identified five crucial purposes (as enumerated below) of *identity* depending on the context to which it is being used and understood.

- a. The most likely widespread application of the term *identity* is when it is “understood as a ground or basis of social or political action.” It is used to highlight how action, whether individual or collective, may be governed by certain self-understanding rather than a putatively universal self-interest. It encompasses three distinct, but related, contrasts in the way action is conceptualized and explained. The first contrast is between one's self-awareness and (limited) self-interest. The second contrast is between (supposed) uniformity and particularity. The third contrast is a choice between two interpretations of social position.
- b. *Identity* refers to a fundamental and significant similarity among members of a group or category when viewed as a specifically collective occurrence. This can be interpreted either literally (as similar to "in itself") or subjectively (as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness). This similarity is anticipated to reflect solidarity, common mindsets or beliefs, or group actions. The term *identity* is prevalent particularly in the literature on social movements, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationalism.
- c. *Identity* is used to allude to something allegedly profound, fundamental, enduring, or foundational. It is interpreted as a central component of (individual or collective) "selfhood" or as a fundamental requirement of social being. It is understood as something to be cherished, nurtured, supported, acknowledged, and preserved in contrast to more superficial, accidental, fleeting, or contingent aspects or attributes of one's self.
- d. *Identity*, seen as the outcome of social or political action, is used to emphasize the interactive and progressive growth of a group in terms of self-understanding, solidarity, or "groupness" that can enable collaborative action.

- e. *Identity*, seen as the fleeting outcome of various and conflicting discourses, is used to emphasize the unstable, numerous, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the modern “self.”

In addition, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) also mentioned some flawed presumptions about *identity*:

- a. Everyone has, or should have, or is looking for, an *identity*.
- b. *Identity* is something that all groups have or should have, at least groups of a certain kind, such as ethnic, racial, or national groups.
- c. People (and groups) can have *identity* without even being conscious of it. According to this viewpoint, *identity* is something that must be found and that is subject to error.
- d. Strong ideas about group bondedness and homogeneity are implied by strong ideas about communal identity. These ideas suggest a strong sense of group identity, similarity among group members, sharp distinction from outsiders, and a distinct line separating insiders and outsiders.

Due to the complicated and problematic ideas associated with the term *identity* in general, I am going to focus on the concept of social identity theory (SIT) in this thesis.

3.1.1 Social Identity Theory

From John Donne’s famous quote, “*No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main*”, it is clear that humans are by nature sociable creatures. In fact, Baumeister and Leary (1995) states that a social psychological viewpoint governs our need for interpersonal connections, which is rooted in our evolutionary past. These social linkages can strengthen bonds, but they can also exacerbate or create differences between groups, group members and outsiders.

According to the social identity theory, a person's social identity is the awareness of membership in a social categorization or group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). A social community is a collection of people who share the same social identity or who see themselves as part of the same social category. People who are comparable to the *self* (representative of a certain

group) are classified with the *self* and given the label of the in-group; whereas, people who are different from the *self* are classified as the out-group through the process of social comparison. In earlier researches, social identification has included the psychological counterparts of in-group classification based on emotional and evaluative aspects (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Based on the social identity theory, our knowledge and emotional ties to our group memberships have an impact on our wellbeing and behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For instance, we feel good about ourselves because of group participation and belongingness. It is inevitable, but as human as we are, we tend to compare our group with other group(s). It sounds unprofessional, but the process of comparing can help in developing a favorable perspective for the group. In a process known as intergroup differentiation, we make an effort to set apart our own group or the in-group from the out-groups or those groups to which we do not belong. Considerable evidence shows that intergroup discrimination or favoring of one's own group is prevalent when rewards are given out. It may not come as a surprise that during a resource allocation, social identities might lead to a conflict due to intergroup discrimination (La Macchia & Louis, 2016).

There are two critical social identity-formation processes, namely: *self-categorization* and *social comparison*, which provide different consequences to people (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). The *self-categorization* has the effect of drawing attention towards the perceived contrasts between the *self* and members of the out-group, and the similarities between the *self* and other in-group members. This effect occurs for all characteristics such as attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, speech patterns, and other traits, which connect to the relevant intergroup categorization. On the other hand, the *social comparison* process affects those dimensions or characteristics that relate to an improvement of one's personal well-being. For instance, judging the in-group and the out-group based on a certain set of criteria, which causes the in-group to be positively appraised and the out-group to be negatively assessed, can increase one's self-esteem. The social categories that people identify with are parts of a structured society, as emphasized by Abrams and Hogg (1988). These social categories that lead to a structured society only exist because of acknowledging the presence of other contrasting categories (e.g., black vs. white) based on different degrees of power, prestige, position, and other characteristics. Furthermore, social categories predate

persons, which result in an already-organized society. This indicates that a person derives most of his/her identity or sense of one's self from the social grouping(s) or society(ies) where he/she was born or belongs. Since a person is exposed to different social categories during a person's lifetime, a person can have a unique collection of social identities that would collectively or competitively define that person (La Macchia & Louis, 2016). These different social identities can be related to religion (Section 3.1.2) or ethnicity (Section 3.1.3).

3.1.2 Religious identity

Religion is typically regarded as one of the oldest and most basic types of group identity. People are oftentimes segregated from one another due to nationalist, ethnic, and/or religious differences in many parts of the globe. As demonstrated by the examples of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, these rivalries are frequently handed down from one generation to the next. In many occasions where there is conflict, one can frequently find religion being involved in a number of different ways.

Regarding religion and its role in society at large, there are many schools of opinion. Karl Marx offers one viewpoint, contending that religion is a manifestation of the material world and economic injustice. Richard Dawkins, a prominent modern theorist, believes that religion is detrimental because it can lead to interpersonal conflicts. Religion is considered social because it allows a person to sense a feeling of belonging to a community with other believers of the same faith. In as much as it lends a sense of transcendent to non-religious national celebrations and traditions or "civil religion," religion can also act as a link between nationhood and nationalism (Kollantai, 2008).

Kollontai (2018) stated that religion and national identity are related to one another. Religious belief systems "have a particular identity forming potential...religion tells you where you belong and where to proceed". But, the capacity of a religious belief system to form an identity depends as well on other contexts and its interaction with other identity-forming elements such as language, ethnicity, politics and society. Based on this, religious identification can range from inclusiveness to exclusiveness, which creates clear distinctions between the insider and the outsider. These distinctions are related to national and ethnic identification. Religion can promote nationalism, which in its worst form has the potential to degrade, expel, or even murder those who are perceived as outsiders in a nation. Particularly

when religious distinctions coincide with other dividing lines like ethnic, economic, or geographic ones, religion is a potent source of identification. This is evident in the former Yugoslavia, where its population has included a variety of ethnic groups over the course of history and each ethnic group has its own history, culture, language, and religious legacy. "Brother, you must understand, here religion is nationality, religion is ethnicity, religion is everything," one religious leader allegedly said. The conflict in Yugoslavia demonstrates how religious identities can be extremely inclusive or especially exclusive, which encourages the idea of "Us" and "Them." A religion has significance for its adherents, the insiders or "Us"; whereas, significant aspects of that religion and its adherent community may not be readily available to outsiders or "Them." This makes it obvious how religion can be used to maintain and magnify such differences, especially in situations where national and/or ethnic identification is in doubt or in danger (Kollontai, 2018).

There are thousands of different religions in the world, and each one has a particular connection to the dominant political, educational, and cultural power structures. In many everyday discussions of societal problems, religion and religious identifications play a significant role. Clearly, there is a lot of public discourse in Europe about the role that minority religious traditions and group identities play in societal conflict. It is frequently believed that minority faith-based identities promote segregation and the parallel living of lives (Cantle, 2005), which hinders cohesion and confidence. According to a survey research of van Oudenhoven, Prins, and Buunk (1998), such presumptions are particularly strong in connection to Islam, where majority group members frequently believe that Muslim identities undermine societal identification. But assuming that Muslim identifications prevent national identifications, is false (van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). Additionally, it is false to believe that residential segregation is a result of minority religion group members' hostility toward outsiders (Phillips, 2006). Yet, these presumptions continue to have influence because they are supported by widely held beliefs about who we are. Indeed, as Sen (2006) examines, such presumptions can actually help to produce and perpetuate intergroup conflict.

Our interactions with others in our society may be influenced by our allegiance to or non-allegiance from a specific religious group. Furthermore, some religious identities may have influence and privileges over others, while other identities do not. According to sociologists, those who identify as Christians are frequently the ones who are best represented in social and

political organizations in the United States. The "Christian privilege" refers to the advantages that those Christian-identified people may have in politics and society. However, not everyone who is expected to have Christian privilege, has such privilege because hierarchy and power may play a role.

3.1.3 Ethnic identity

The ethnic identity refers to a person's experience of belonging to a certain ethnic group according to Phiney (1996). The ethnic group is typically a group that the person claims lineage from. Even though there is a chance that everyone in the group could impact one another, one's ethnic identity is separate from their unique identity. A person's sense of identity can be influenced by belonging to a certain ethnic group and culture. This sense of identity or belonging is particularly evident when one studies relationships between (and within) ethnic minorities and the larger civilizations in which they reside (Bar-Tal, 2013).

In a lot of conflicts that are happening within and between societies, one can find that ethnic societies are involved. Ethnic societies or groups refer to "*collectives, whose membership is determined on the basis of perceived common past, common culture, common language and common destiny. It means that ethnicity is based also on perception and awareness of shared characteristics, as well as cognized differences from other groups*" (Bar-Tal, 2013). Ethnic wars have been labeled as the main type of violent conflict in the recent years. According to the "Major Episodes of Political Violence" database, ethnic violence has increased steadily from the conclusion of the Second World War until the mid-1990s (Marshall, 2003). Between 1985 and 1994 (termed here as Period 2), one hundred sixty (160) instances of "ethnic warfare" were recorded, which is a significant number for a short time period of 10 years. Ethnic conflict and other "ethnic violence" made up 67% of the recorded episodes of political violence during Period 2, where 36% out of 67% was related to the 50 ethnic warfare cases that occurred approximately 20 years before Period 2 (that is, between 1964 and 1975). In the previous decade of Period 2, that is within 1975 – 1984 termed here as Period 1, the recorded episodes of political violence related to ethnicity issues is 55%, which is lower than in Period 2. Then a decade after Period 2, that is within 1995 – 2004 and is termed as Period 3, the ethnicity-related incidents dropped to 52%. Although there is a fluctuation in the percentage, still the percentage significant (above 50%). It is important to note that the majority of cases

of intra-state violence that took place during these periods were not part of the statistics because they are not considered as instances of ethnic violence. Brubaker and Laitin (1998) have emphasized that a pronounced 'ethnic turn' or ethnic-related study has emerged in the study of political violence. As a result, this 'ethnic turn' trend has changed the academic interest significantly in solving the conflict-related problems. Indeed, in social psychology theories of conflict and violence, ethnic identity is emerging as a key explanatory term. According to Worchel (1999), ethnicity is a "starring role on the historical stage of human identity and conflict".

Combatants are now frequently referred to *ethnic groups fighting an ethnic war* when collective violence scenarios are difficult to be understood or related as nation-states at war with one another or revolutionary acts or (counter-) colonial violence. But, what does the term *ethnic groups* refer to? As a method of classification, ethnicity is used to distinguish between groups according to culture (e.g., language, religion, habits, folklore), territory (e.g., homeland, geographical topology), or occasionally, still-natural factors (e.g., phenotype, race, descent). When ethnicity is in question, it has the capacity to create a mythical story for a community that encompasses its (idealized) history or past, present, and (promised) future. In fact, ethnicity serves as a useful meta-category, bringing together a wide range of social aspects that are utilized to explain collective hostilities and violence. Ethnicity is not just an analytical category for identifying groups in conflict, but also has an inherent concept of flexibility, which makes the term *ethnic war* so appealing, particularly to conflict analysts. This indicates that the concept of flexibility should not be viewed as accidental (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998).

Interestingly, the involved parties in a conflict rarely bring up the issue of ethnicity. When they need to address their constituency in inclusive terms to garner the greatest amount of support as possible, political leaders are typically keener to address them as "the nation" or "the people of..." rather than "the [name of ethnic group]". This way of addressing the people communicates a claim for statehood, which might be classified as nationalism. Nationalism is a concept that nationalists address the corresponding population as a "nation" without waiting for an independent and recognized nation-state to arise first. For instance, it would be hard to envision how the Irish Republican Army or the Scottish National Party could present an argument for independence if they would refer themselves as the "Army of the Ethnic Irish"

or the "Scottish Ethnic Party". Although the existence of a particular ethnic character might occasionally be a resource for national mobilization, which makes it easier to emphasize the uniqueness and longevity of the national in-group, this can also be a challenge. For instance, the early Catalan nationalism had placed a heavy emphasis on the language, while the early Basque nationalism did not. The linguistically-defined group, the Catalan in this example, had been used as a foundation for mobilization, which excluded the majority of the population (Reicher & Hopkins, 2002). This scenario relates to the more general issue:

“Nationalism frequently seeks to forge an intriguing connection among a population, a territory, and a destiny, and that the majority of categorical criteria for ethnic affiliation are more likely to highlight the discrepancy between these three elements than the supposed naturalness of their association. Ethnic nationalism very frequently either tends to undermine the viability of the national idea or, in the most tragic circumstances, to open the door to extreme measures for "redressing" the mismatch, such as mass expulsions, ethnic cleansing, or genocide”.

On the other hand, in the absence of a claim for statehood or nationalism, communities that are aware of their ethnic distinctiveness may not think of themselves as nations. For instance, while there are ethnic and racial ghettos in (American) cities, "there is no African-American or Italian-American state, with its own bordered territory and with its claims for national independence" according to Billig (1995).

In the recent years, a rising number of quantitative research has been employed specifically in the field of political science to investigate the relationship between ethnicity and conflict. In order to predict the likelihood for an escalation to happen for a certain violence, it is a standard practice to quantify indicators such as *ethnic fractionalization* or *ethnic polarization* and include these indicators in the analysis of large macrolevel datasets of armed conflict across the globe (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005; Vanhanen, 1999). The overall conclusion of these quantitative studies is that when the ethnic-related indicator varies significantly, the probability of escalating the conflict increases.

3.1.4 Right to Self Determination

The concept of self-determination has evolved through time and was founded on liberalism and democracy. The Right to Self Determination (RSD) was emplaced during the French Bourgeois Revolution and was mentioned in both the 1776 American Declaration of Independence and the 1789 French Declaration. The basic idea is the conviction that a government can only be regarded as legitimate if it was established with the consent of the governed body. While there have always been varying views on self-determination, the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 is directly responsible for the present understanding of the concept. Self-determination as a political idea propelled the remaking of Europe under its patronage (Shikova, 2022).

The manifestation of the people's free will in reference to their political position is at the heart of the phrase "right to self-determination". Self-government and nationalism are influenced by the concept self-determination. In the setting of the American Revolution, the political goal of self-determination took the form of "self-government". Regarding territorial changes during French Revolution, self-determination served as a standard for the French Revolutionaries. In the period between the two World Wars, the political ideal was disregarded as a principle for the sake of pragmatism, as evidenced by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the Aaland Islands Case (case no. 13). Even though it may sound strange, one must tackle the idea of *nationalism* in order to pinpoint the beginnings of self-determination because self-determination included characteristics of both *nationalism* and *democracy*. In practice, internal self-determination was closer to nationalism than to democracy because self-determination was recognized by an international law. In this regard, *the history of self-determination is a history of the making of nations and the breaking of States*.

Autonomy and self-determination are closely connected concepts, and self-governing communities are frequently referred to as self-determining communities. The gap between two commitments that are different with respect to one another has to be filled with a satisfying theory of self-determination. Such theory or concept should indicate that the people can only exercise self-determination when they act and live together in a meaningful way. The group or community, not simply a single person or even an aggregate number of people who

makes up the group, is where self-determination has to be exercised. Thus, self-determination has to be practiced by a group rather than by each person in a group.

Importantly, self-determination is a shared ideal. The French Revolution, which supported the right of the people to self-determination, advanced the idea of territory transfer because territorial changes involve the will of the inhabitants of the territories. The political principle of self-determination eventually began to serve as a blueprint for what would happen to the citizens in contested territories. The relevance of the notion underlying the American and French revolutions together was brilliantly encapsulated by Judge Dillard's well-known adage, *"It is for the people to determine the destiny of the territory and not the territory the destiny of the people."* (Tesón, 2016)

3.2 Peace-building processes to end a conflict

The path to peacebuilding starts when people belonging to a community (i) embrace the belief that conflicts should be handled cordially, and (ii) start to take action to make this belief a reality. The moment the belief becomes prevalent among the people in the community, the long process of encouraging the community or the society to settle a conflict harmoniously starts. According to Galtung (1975) and Rouhana (2004), there are many words used to characterize this process of peace-building, such as:

"Peace building process can be defined as continuous exerted efforts by society members, society's institutions, agents, channels of communications and the international community to realize full lasting peaceful relations with the past rival within the framework of culture of peace. Peace building thus includes all the acts that are done to facilitate the achievement of this goal that is reflected in reconciliation." (Rivera, 2009; Lederach, 1997)

"Peace-making in contrast focuses only the acts toward reaching an official settlement of the conflict which is a formal agreement between the rival sides to end the confrontation."

(Zartman, 2007)

"Within the process of peace making, conflict resolution refers to the negotiation process that takes place between decision-makers to reach its formal settlement." (Bar-Tal, Halperin, &

Oren, 2010)

What is peace-building? Peace-building, according to former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, refers to an “*action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict.*” This definition was further clarified by the 2000 Brahimi Report on Peacekeeping Reform as “*activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just absence of war.*”

3.2.1 Factors that may mobilize peace

There are several contributions that attempt to clarify the ripe conditions, which might aid in the process of bringing about peace and resolving conflicts. For instance, Zartman (2000) argued that *a conflict is ripe for resolution (i.e., for negotiations toward resolution to begin) if the (two) parties (i) perceive themselves to be in a hurting stalemate, and (ii) perceive the possibility of a negotiated solution (a way out).* It is also suggested that societies may start negotiating for a peaceful resolution of the conflict on the basis of the prospect theory (Kahneman, 1979; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). This occurs when society members realize that the losses resulting from the ongoing conflict outweigh the losses as outcomes of a peaceful resolution that a society may experience. The vast majority of society's members appear to be persuaded to support the peace process primarily for self-utilitarian reasons. Only a tiny minority would consider the matter from a moral standpoint. When society as a whole demobilizes from supporting the goals of the conflict and mobilizes for its peaceful settlement, conflicts may eventually de-escalate and proceed toward their peaceful resolution (Gidron, Katz, & Hasenfeld, 2002).

3.2.2 Peace-building process and its stages

There are three dimensions of post conflict peace-building, namely; stability creation, restoration of state institutions, and addressing the socioeconomic dimension of conflict. The stability of creation as the first dimension is the desire to reinforce stability and discourage combatants from returning to war. Peace-building continues an important function of peacekeeping when there is an attempt to maintain a cease-fire and stability by monitoring the combatants. Yet, peace-building can go beyond maintaining a cease-fire. In particular, peace-building activities directly attempt to reduce the means available and the incentives for actors to return to conflict. Consequently, this results in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration

programs, security sector reform, and arms control for light and heavy weapons systems. The general claim or idea is that for peace to prevail, the toys must be removed from the boys. However, reducing the resources and means for going to war is not enough to retain peace. The former combatants have to be reintegrated, which requires alternative avenues for the pursuit of wealth and social recognition (Bar-Tal, Halperin, & Oren, 2010). The second dimension is helping to build or restore key state functions that have the capacity to generate basic public goods and pose a degree of legitimacy. A basic function of the state is the production of public goods. The third dimension is the attempt to build, not only the states, but also society's ability to manage conflict peacefully and develop the socioeconomic infrastructure necessary to underpin economic development. Towards that end, peace-builders are involved in trauma counselling, transitional justice and reconciliation, community dialogue, strengthening civil society organizations, increasing human rights, promoting environmental awareness, assisting with gender empowerment, building bridges between different communities, and promoting economic development.

To sum it up, peace-building simply pertains to activities that aim to build sustainable, just, and peaceful relationships in the wake of war or other systemic human rights violations. Peace-building might also include humanitarian relief, refugee resettlement, the demobilization and re-integration of ex-combatants, security-sector reform, election monitoring, judicial reform, social and economic development, and other activities. Peace-building involves explicit efforts to address past injustices as well (Philpott, 2014).

3.2.3 Peace-building: Dos, Don'ts and Clues for a shift

According to the traditional theory put forward by Lewin (1947), unfreezing is a necessary component of every process of cognitive transformation in both individuals and communities. Therefore, the ability to destabilize the rigid structure of the socio-psychological repertoire about the conflict that dominates the engaged cultures, is a prerequisite for the adoption and internalization of any alternative content about the conflict or peace-building. This task is particularly difficult because it frequently starts with a minority who must have bravery to offer alternative ideas to other members of society. Then, the vast majority of society's members frequently see this minority as traitor(s) who undermine(s) the group's goals and harm(s) the national cause, or at best, as ignorant and disconnected from reality. However, the

formation of this minority has implications for both the dominant society and the opposing group. It can start or encourage a comparable process in the opposite group. A movement and a shift in the environment may develop over time as a result of the persistence of this small minority, which may finally create the opportunity to begin a successful campaign for a peaceful resolution of the issue. The establishment of peace requires the assistance of formal leaders, and some of these leaders may engage in the peace-making process early on in an effort to start resolving conflicts. In the majority of situations, peace-making entails bottom-up procedures in which groups, grass-roots activists, and members of civil society support the concepts of peace-building and work together to spread these concepts among leaders (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009).

On the other side or the other party, top-down processes are required in which rising leaders join forces and start persuading the people of society that a peaceful resolution to the dispute is necessary, and start executing the peace process. The establishment of peace must eventually be supported by the institutions and elites of the society and at least a sizable majority of the populace (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Knox & Quirk, 2000; Weiner, 1998). The function of the mass media and other social communication channels and organizations is significant, particularly in showing support for the development of a peace orientation by transmitting and disseminating the new system of beliefs among society members. According to the principles of persuasion, new beliefs can persuade people when these beliefs are introduced with clear objectives, strategies, information, images, considerations, arguments, and reasons for establishing peace. These new convictions ought to create a fresh lens through which to view reality and take in information. In any case, for the peace-making process to be successful, new alternative concepts must be disseminated, given legitimacy, and eventually institutionalized in society (Bar-Tal, Landman, Magal, & Rosler, 2009).

Changes in the circumstances, which can alert society members to reconsider the held repertoire that fueled the persistence of the conflict, can often freeze the peace process. A few potential modifications to be aware of are the following:

- First, when conflict experience and factors build up, such as tiredness, significant casualties in terms of both people and property, ongoing deadlock, and ineffective governance, this may cause the setting to alter.

- Second, large events like the start of a war, a bold act of peace, or extremely violent incidents may cause the peace-building to shift.
- Third, when the peace-building can result in the rival's conciliation and trust-building efforts, this can cause a perceived shift in the opponents' motivations, intents, and objectives.
- Fourth, internal processes or events unrelated to conflict (such as a recession, starvation, or the appearance of a new opponent) may influence change by inadvertently motivating people to re-evaluate the significance and centrality of the conflict.
- Fifth, a third significant party has the power to intervene and alter the situation. This intervention can take many different shapes, including negotiation, offering incentives, persuasion, sending troops or bombs, or even an economic boycott.
- Sixth, new leaders who are less dedicated to the ideology of the conflict come to power and are able to develop fresh perspectives on the conflict and establish new contexts. A new context might also be created by the entry of a new generation, which views the war and its effects differently. The fall of a superpower and changes in the international environment, for example, are not directly related to the conflict but may have an impact on the parties in the future, causing a need to re-evaluate the situation. It goes without saying that the cultures engaged in the extreme and brutal conflict are mostly responsible for starting along the path to peace.

Again, peace cannot be realized without the tenacity and persistence of forces that actively work for it because wanting peace is simply not enough. Nearly everyone on this planet values peace and aspires to live under its protection. But it is not that easy; achieving peace means letting go of idealistic fantasies, taking practical steps toward pragmatism, and altering the psychological repertory that has long served as a guide for the fight. If the process of bringing about peace is to be successful, even objectives that are underpinned by fairness and moral principles must finally be sacrificed in favor of practical concerns. This procedure is difficult.

Conflict can be difficult to resolve psychologically. When perceived dangers, whether real or metaphorical, the communal memories of the struggle and its philosophy are automatically aroused in the memory system. As a result, the orientation toward peace must not only prevent the natural activation of ideas related to conflict, but also displace and replace those beliefs and behaviors with new ones. Before the collection of new beliefs replaces the conflict repertoire that is always activated, the new beliefs need to be understood, accepted, and practiced. Although the conflict may become less intractable during the peace-making process, it nevertheless persists and may still manifest violently in the form of terrorist acts against innocent populations, military encounters, combat or unrest. Even after reaching a legal settlement, hostile and aggressive behavior rarely stops abruptly and frequently lasts for years. This is a difficult task when conflict signs persist because not only does the conflict repertory become accessible, but spoilers of the peace process are also aware of these indicators and know how to exploit them to stir up hostility, fear, and hatred. In such a scenario, how authorities and the media respond to the ominous signals is critical. A peace process has very little likelihood of progressing when the events are framed in a way that supports a conflict orientation. The chances of the peacemaking process surviving, gaining momentum, and progressing to the stage of conflict settlement are much higher when leaders and media on both sides explicitly denounce the acts and their perpetrators, downplay their significance for the public, and reassure them of their commitment to peace (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009).

3.2.4 Reconciliation and its relation to justice, peace and mercy

Reconciliation can be conceived as a comprehensive, relational idea of justice that embraces a variety of peace-building methods, even those that are frequently in conflict or are perceived to be at odds. The act of reconciling in ancient and religious periods is thought to be an action of conquering hostility, a condition of embrace, or possibly a private and intimate matter. Indeed, the idea of reconciliation as a concept of justice can be found in the writings and practices of ancient religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The definition of reconciliation in these religious traditions certainly in significant correlation with the definitions for *justice*, *peace*, and *mercy*; albeit perhaps not in every theological interpretation of them. Thus, reconciliation is a concept that can be expressed in both secular and religious words, but not in a religious way only (Philpott, 2014).

In the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the actual terms used for reconciliation are the following: (1) the Greek words *katallage* and *katallosso* found in the New Testament, (2) the Arabic word *musalaha* in the Quran, (3) the Hebrew word *teshuva* in the Tanakh (Old Testament), which is just closely related to reconciliation and not perfectly identical when translated, and (4) the words *tikkun olam* found in the later Jewish tradition.

As for the term *justice*, it is frequently translated to something similar with *righteousness* in those religious traditions. *Righteousness* pertains to the requirements of right relationship with the members of a community, including economic, political, family, and cultic aspects, and most importantly with respect to God (or gods). In the New Testament, Greek terms or words that have a prefix of *dik*, such as *dikaioō* and *dikaioōsunē*, are translated and related to *justice* and *righteousness*. In the Tanakh or Old Testament, various Hebrew words that reflect in the scripture are also related to *justice* and *righteousness*. In addition, the Arabic word *adl* can also mean *justice* and *righteousness*. Apart from its *righteousness* denotation, the concept of justice can also refer to both an unbroken state of proper relationship and a process of mending a broken relationship. For example, the term *justice* in the Second Isaiah is correlated with salvation and denoted a broad range of reparative actions, which is referred to a process of restoration in the Tanakh. Apparently, *justice* can have two meanings in most religious traditions, either to denote *righteousness* or *salvation*.

As for the word *peace*, its values as conditions of right relationship(s) are commonly connected to the virtue of reconciliation. *Peace* is the result of the restoration processes, a completely right and harmonious relationship, and an administration of justice. The word *peace* appears as Greek word *eirene* in the New Testament, and Hebrew word *shalom* in the Old Testament. Both words refer to a comprehensive condition of right relationships in a community. In the Quran, the Arabic term *salaam* is used, which shares linguistic similarities with the Hebrew word *shalom*.

For reconciliation to occur and to maintain or restore the condition of right relationship (which is *peace*), *mercy* as a procedure has to be executed. *Mercy* is the engine of peace. Since the Enlightenment period, kindness or an act of mercy is conceived as a deviation or exception from the justice of punishment. According to Pope John Paul II, the virtue of mercy is "*manifested in its true and proper aspect when it gives value to, promotes, and*

draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man." In the religious scriptures, the word *mercy* is termed as *eleos* in Greek for the New Testament, *hesed* and *rahamin* in Hebrew for the Old Testament, and *rahma* in Arabic for the Quran. Overall, the act of mercy suggests that every action and behavior should have a rehabilitative goal in terms of promoting peace.

As discussed above, the aforementioned religious scriptures and traditions contain the four cornerstones of reconciliation concepts: reconciliation itself, justice, peace, and mercy. These concepts are supported by both (1) the scripture accounts of God's response to immorality in ancient times, and (2) the social norms that have developed with time. The Enlightenment tradition has provided logical answers to the problem of evil, whereas the scriptures portray a God who responds to the challenge of evil by acting. In various ways, including punishment, mercy, atonement, and the restoration of justice for the underprivileged and displaced, the Tanakh manifests a God who repairs His covenant with the Jewish people. The Tanakh urges kings and other authorities to behave similarly, that is, to provide responses and actions to a variety of violations of right relationships that have an impact on political systems. The *teshuva* rituals, which are sort of repentances comprising restitution, remorse, confession, and the wrongdoer's resolution to change, were used by the offender, victim, and community members in medieval Jewish communities. These rituals serve as examples of the underlying ideas behind a thorough healing of ties within a community. In a similar way, justice is carried out in the New Testament through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

There is no denying that over time, various theological interpretations of atonement have changed. While the juristic model emerged throughout the late Middle Ages and the Reformation, the holistic restoration paradigm dominated the early church of the first millennium. The twentieth-century rebirth of the restoration paradigm among Catholic and Protestant theologians, with an application to political and social challenges, has been a positive development for the work at hand. God does not offer an atoning sacrifice in the Quran, but God nonetheless atones for sin. The Quran constantly exhorts Muslims to pardon those who turn to God in repentance. Later Muslim traditions of *musalaha* addressed the crimes that are committed inside the community through conversation, confession, reparations, forgiveness, and rites for reintegrating the offender into society. Such traditions are much like Jewish communal rituals of *teshuva*.

3.2.5 Reconciliation as a peace-building process

The foundations of reconciliation are peace, mercy, God's restorative response to evil, communal rituals of reconciliation, and justice understood as right relationship (in terms of restorative process and resulting state), which are derived from religious traditions. Reconciling the actual harm that injustices cause to just relationships, is at the heart of restorative justice and other core concepts of reconciliation. The justice of reconciliation works by attempting to rectify wrongs done to people and to mend the broken relationships. The peace of reconciliation develops the prerequisite for a healthy relationship, as a result of this restoration. Mercy is a virtue that seeks to fix things when they are broken. There are two techniques that are utilized to give these notions a substance and specificity: (1) defining the concrete harms, or wounds, that injustices inflict on individuals and interpersonal relationships; and (2) detailing a collection of political actions that heal these wound (Philpott, 2014).

After the conflict between civilizations has been formally resolved, the establishment or restoration of sincere, peaceful connections between civilizations that have experienced unresolvable conflict is what reconciliation scholars in the current decade generally agreed on. Reconciliation extends beyond the formal conflict resolution agenda to altering the motivations, objectives, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the vast majority of society's members regarding the conflict, the nature of their interactions with the parties, and the parties themselves. The first requirement for reconciliation (without a doubt) involves equalization, humanization, and personalizing of the adversary (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). This act of acceptance enables to see the adversary as a legitimate peace partner and as a human being who deserves of equal humanitarian treatment. In order to resolve the issue and then build harmonious ties, reconciliation also requires seeing the conflict as solvable, and acknowledging that all sides or civilizations have genuine grievances, objectives, and needs that must be met. These fundamental adjustments pave the way for the reconciliation effort to advance. In a broad scale, numerous requirements have been put out by various authors. Marrow (1999), for instance, noted that reconciliation "*is reestablishment of friendship that can inspire sufficient trust across the traditional split*". In the concept of trust-building, the fundamental goal of reconciliation is to be understanding of others' needs. In addition, the key question for the reconciliation process to advance is not what they must do, but rather, what

we must do. The four components of intra-societal reconciliation proposed by Lederach (1997) that can be used to intersocietal conflicts are the following:

- (1) Truth, which necessitates frank disclosure of the past and calls for admittance, acknowledgement, and openness.
- (2) Mercy, which calls for reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing.
- (3) Justice calls for reparations, financial recompense, social reform, and other measures.
- (4) Peace, which emphasizes shared future, collaboration, coordination, wellbeing, harmony, respect, institutionalized conflict-resolution processes, and security for all parties.

The paradigm of Long and Brecke (2003) contends that forgiveness needs a new perspective on both sides, truth-telling about the harm done by both parties, giving up on retaliation and full justice, and forging new and constructive relationships, which all support the components of societal reconciliation that are enumerated above.

In addition to those four components of societal reconciliation, the following items are added by Kriesberg (2004):

- (5) Respect, which entails acknowledging one another's humanity and the identities of the societies.
- (6) Security, which makes sure everyone in society is protected from physical harm.

Furthermore, Kelman (1999) has expounded on these elements of what he refers to as a "positive peace." According to this perspective, reconciliation must include the following elements:

- (a) A resolution to the dispute that satisfies the parties' fundamental requirements and realizes their national aspirations.
- (b) Mutual acceptance and respect for the existence and wellbeing of the opposing group.

(c) The growth of a sense of safety and respect for each group. Establishing cooperative interaction patterns across several fields.

(d) Institutionalizing conflict resolution techniques.

Reconciliation was described by Kelman (2004) as "*the development of working trust, the transformation of the relationship toward a partnership based on reciprocity and mutual responsiveness, and an agreement that addresses both parties' fundamental needs.*" He asserts that in order to change one's identity, *internalization* is a technique that must be used.

Commonly, it is understood that for the reconciliation process to be successful, a new and agreed view on the past is required. Furthermore, if there is knowledge and acceptance of the past, both parties go much closer in building reconciliation. According to Hayner (1999), negotiating for reconciliation has to be genuine, else "*where fundamentally different versions or continued denials about such important and painful events still exist, reconciliation may only be superficial*". It is important to point out that numerous social psychologists have recently concentrated their research on this fundamental idea about reconciliation by examining related aspects like guilt feelings, taking responsibility, and apologizing (Branscombe, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2004; Brown & Cehajic, 2008).

Unquestionably, only reconciliation can resolve the revealing indications of asymmetrical conflicts from all angles. For instance, it is very crucial to address the circumstances that existed prior to the conflict's development, when one party committed various types of injustices including discrimination, exploitation, or occupation. Thus, reconciliation as a process should cover all the possible methods that can resolve the dispute, including any instances of unjustified violence against civilians (i.e., genocide, ethnic cleansing, mass murder, collective punishment, deportations, and mass executions). This indicates that reconciliation is a long process, and so is the peace-building. In this process, the cultures and relationships of involved parties or civilizations must be substantially rebuilt. Thus, political–economic–societal–cultural processes are very necessary to implement for the reconciliation to succeed.

3.2.6 Re-negotiation of identity as a peace-building process

It takes a substantial amount of time and effort to work toward social reconciliation. There are many various factors and concerns that have to be taken into consideration in the reconciliation process, where some of these factors and concerns are difficult to implement. For instance, establishing a shared identity between the two resentful or estranged parties is one of the crucial difficulties. Establishing a shared identity requires investigation of present identities, which is a complex task in and of itself. This is because present identities have to be identified and determined inside a community and outside the community, as well as the adjudication of the various versions of history preserved by each party. A shared identity also serves as a foundation for establishing a different future, rather than just forging a common history (Schreiter, 2008).

Making peace in both conflict and post-conflict contexts is a complicated task. If peace through societal reconciliation has to be sustained, the peace process (particularly the societal reconciliation process) must also occur at a variety of levels. A crucial step in such a peace process is re-negotiating group identities in order to move towards a scenario where peaceful coexistence may be perpetuated. When group identities are in conflict, it is evident that identities are frequently warped into what conflict theorist M. Gopin (2006) refers to as *negative identity*. This *negative identity* is created in opposition to the *other* in a way that transforms the *other* into a *threatening other*. One of the tragic consequences of this *negative identity* development is the creation of desire to continue to perceive the *other* as a threat in order to preserve a consistent sense of identity (Clegg, 2008). One of the most important lessons learned in implementing the societal reconciliation process is that the identity re-negotiation must start as soon as the peace agreement is signed. In this way, the development of *negative identity* may pause or completely stop. Thus, before a peace deal is reached, efforts and works have to be focused on society's group-to-group reconciliation to create a positive and secure sense of identity on all sides of the conflict. In order for this group-to-group reconciliation to work, the community or people have to practice their rights to talk freely. Thereby, it is essential to carry out the group activity in intra-tradition groupings, rather than across communities.

The re-negotiation of identity involves a movement in two different fronts. First, finding a strategy to assist people in connecting or reestablishing contact with the good aspects of their identities, such as language, culture, heritage, and other aspects. This includes the desire to develop cooperative identity expression, as opposed to oppositional expression. Second, encouraging to recognize and let go of some aspects of their identities that have been negatively framed. For instance, Catholic or Nationalists had grown to feel implicitly and frequently explicitly that their group was being persecuted by British power, which was expected and understandable given the grounds behind the movement. As a result, the group have created an identity on its own, which did not include authority or management of the organization. In its most severe and aggressive form, the Nationalists aimed to remove the government by force. This creates semi-detachment of the majority from the operations of the government, which was more obvious at the local level. The urge for freedom from the restrictions of a distorted identity in victimhood is controlled by a strong, positive sense of identity as citizens of North Ireland. While this situation may appear to be a significant benefit, this also entails a new shared responsibility for the decisions and deeds of the state, which may not sit well with individuals who are accustomed to verbally or physically criticizing the government. On the other hand, the Protestant or Unionist group, which had been in power since Ireland was divided in 1922, developed an implicit and frequently vocal attitude of superiority. They became known as the people who were in command of the status of Northern Ireland's affairs. With this, it was challenging for the Unionist group to be part of a shared identity, because this entailed losing a status of supremacy to equal citizenship, and recovering a good sense of one's identity. Thus, a painful rebalancing had to take so that the Unionist community could potentially find the distinctive contribution they can offer to the new shared destiny of Northern Ireland (Clegg, 2008).

Helping groups to re-negotiate their identities in any circumstance is challenging from a methodological standpoint. Because of the recent history of antagonism and the constant possibility of further fighting or dissolution, it becomes even more difficult in conflict and post-conflict situations. In such a methodology, there are numerous potential components, and five of them are the following: (1) secure settings, (2) affirmation, (3) feeling like one of many stakeholders, (4) learning, and (5) new connections (Clegg, 2008). The facilitators must create and uphold secure settings or *safe spaces* where people can feel respected and heard before asking groups to participate in potentially life-changing discourse. Each of the

organizations, regardless of their *denominational, ecumenical, or evangelical orientations*, is fundamentally committed to dialogue, justice, and peace. So, when a group's positive identity and contributions to society are acknowledged and honored, this is affirmation. Re-negotiating identities is a delicate, challenging, and perplexing process for groups. Thus, the groups must possess a strong awareness of the importance of their place in society. The groups must understand that they play a part in the new vision and that they are not the only ones attempting to transform society. At this level, the activity for group-to-group reconciliation is strongest. A potent mechanism for tying together disparate groups and acting as a motivator for future action, is a sense of shared purpose that comes from creating a new way of living together in a society. When communities are stuck in negative identity development, conflict would be fueled by ignorance, half-truths, and myths. A key component of assisting individuals in rediscovering their identity is exposing groups to new information about the other and other's experience. Any reconciliation process must include the desire to learn more about the *other* as a key dynamic. The fifth component, which is information, can take in many different forms and does not directly depend on intergroup interactions. There is no substitute for contact or interaction; however, knowledge gained from sources other than actually meeting the *other* is crucial. New information and contacts often have a gradual effect, but sometimes can be more dramatic (Clegg, 2008).

4 Methodology

This thesis employs mixed methods research, particularly the descriptive (quantitative) statistics and the qualitative research approach by utilizing quantitative and qualitative data from secondary sources, respectively. Those two aforementioned approaches are chosen and integrated to address quantitatively and qualitatively the research questions indicated in Chapter 1. With the mixed methods research, the presentations and discussions of the data to address the research questions (in Chapter 5) are expected to provide a more complete picture than using a quantitative or qualitative research alone. Thus, this thesis can provide a very strong unbiased data and analysis regarding the role of Bangsamoro identity struggle in the Mindanao conflict and the sustainability of the current peace-process (the BOL) through reconciliation.

In this chapter, the individual approach that comprises for mixed methods research is described, and the purpose of each approach in answering the research problem is also discussed (Section 3.1). Then, the data collection process including the sources of the gathered and used data is discussed (Section 3.2), followed by the data analysis (Section 3.3).

4.1 *Research method and design*

Descriptive statistics is the process of utilizing and analysing statistics that quantitatively describe or summarize important features or information from a given or collected data (Hardy and Bryman 2009). In this thesis, descriptive statistics approach is mainly applied, firstly, to visualize and describe the temporal evolution of Mindanao conflict as a whole, in terms of its occurrence (count per year) and number of deaths per year that is related to Mindanao conflict from 2011 to 2020 (Figure 5). Secondly, the same approach is used to describe the temporal trends of the chosen three main causes or issues related to the Mindanao conflict, which are identity, political, and shadow economy issues (Figure 6). These three causes are chosen to be presented in this thesis because they are the most dominant and prominent issues according to Lara (2019) or in Figure 3. Thirdly, using the same datasets, a quantitative assessment as to whether the identity issue plays a significant role in the conflict or not is performed (Figure 6). Fourthly, the trends for the period 2019-2020 are described, during which self-governance is at its fresh years. With this, evaluation and anticipation for the effectivity and sustainability of the current peace agreement Bangsamoro Organic Law

(BOL) in reducing the number of incidents and deaths related to the Mindanao conflict are possible. Finally, breaking down the three main causes into their sub-categories such as religious conflict, violent extremism, illegal drugs, and illegal weapons (see Figure 7 for other sub-categories), religious and ethnicity (violent extremism) are identified to be major issues related to identity struggle.

The second approach in the employed mixed methods research is the commonly used qualitative research, which seeks to understand in depth the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors of people, and to explore and describe a certain phenomenon (Bryman 2016). This approach is applied in this thesis, with the aid of qualitative secondary data such as articles, reports and interviews to describe the Mindanao conflict and articulate the role of Bangsamoro identity struggle in the conflict. The discussions in Chapter 5 about identity struggle and reconciliation as peace process based on qualitative data are supported by the performed descriptive statistics and theoretical background in Chapter 3.

4.2 Data collection

There are variety of approaches for data collection such as conducting interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, secondary data analysis, and online research (Ritchie, et al. 2014). However, as a researcher, several aspects have to be considered when deciding which approach is suitable and reliable for the study. These aspects, which can also be the limiting or determining factors, including resources (i.e., money), availability (time), participants, and skills. Apart from these limiting factors, the type of study to be conducted and the research problem to be answered also determine the data collection approach.

In this thesis, the research problem that needs to be addressed mainly focus on a large-scale and complex issue that can be dangerous when collecting first-hand data. In addition, conducting interviews or focus groups for example can be very costly and time-consuming because the researcher has to travel a distance of 10 487 km from Norway to Mindanao and around BARMM. Due to limited resources and time, the researcher decided to perform secondary data analysis and online research for data collection. Fortunately, Mindanao conflict and its related topics are widely and well-studied research topics, with vast secondary data from interviews and recorded conflict-related incidents and deaths, which are mainly used in this thesis.

According to the National Research Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH), information that is publicly available, which are from secondary sources, can be obtained freely without consent. There are three different ways of accessing data from secondary sources, namely: formal data sharing, informal data sharing, and re-using self-gathered data. Formal data sharing refers to “datasets deposited in public or institutional archives.” On the other hand, informal data sharing involves either of the following:

- (a) primary researcher(s) hand over the data to others without involving themselves in actual secondary analysis
- (b) primary researchers share data with others who are not involved in the research and become part of the secondary analysis or
- (c) two or three researchers work together using their own generated datasets for secondary analysis.

For an approach that involves re-using of self-gathered data, these datasets are used to investigate new research or verify previous findings (Heaton 2008).

From those three ways that are commonly used in accessing data, this thesis specifically utilizes formal data sharing due to some previously stated limitations, and readily available datasets and analyses that are archived in public repository and/or research institutions or universities and published in well-profound journals and websites. Thereby, I have gathered the data from multiple secondary data sources and have not contacted the corresponding researchers who produced the data that I used in this thesis for information and insights that can potentially create biases in this thesis. For the descriptive statistics approach, the datasets used are collected from International Conflict Alert repository. As for the qualitative research and analysis, the secondary qualitative information that is utilized to support the descriptive statistics analysis is collected from published articles, reports, books and online interviews.

4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis is a framework and a thorough process of pulling important and relevant information from data, which are used in deriving conclusions (Bryman 2016). This thesis mainly uses existing data from public databases, archives (i.e., JSTOR), national and official datasets (i.e., International Conflict Alert), peer-reviewed journals, news articles and mass media outputs like online interviews in videos, which are all considered as documentary data (Bryman 2016, Ritchie, et al. 2014).

For descriptive statistics approach, one component of the mixed methods research that is utilized in this thesis, the datasets (number of incidents and deaths per year) collected from International Conflict Alert are plotted in a line chart (Figures 5 and 6) to illustrate how the number of incidents and/or major drivers for Mindanao conflict change over time. From these plots, different datasets are compared and trends are showed with highs and lows at a given period of time. From the trends, any significant turning point (e.g., from increasing to decreasing trend or vice versa) can be identified, which has important implications to the conflict. In addition, coupling those trends with important events or activities add constraints in the analysis, such as inferring the drivers or triggers for the observed trends and turning point, and may aid for predicting how those trends may behave in the future. Bar charts (e.g., Figure 7) are also included in the presentation to infer which driver or factor is the most dominant.

For a qualitative research approach, which is the second component of the methodology, two approaches that use documentary data can be applied, namely: qualitative content analysis and semiotics (Bryman 2016). In the qualitative content analysis, the researcher's task is to search for dominant theme that lies at the heart of the coding, while the semiotics approach searches for signs or symbols that are used in everyday life (Bryman 2016). The inferred symbols or signs are converted into textual significance. Since this thesis aims to analyze and articulate the role of Bangsamoro identity struggle in the Mindanao conflict, it is appropriate to use the qualitative content analysis to search for this key theme and other themes related to identity issue in the acquired documentary data. With this, identifying those key themes that relate to the Mindanao conflict is expected to be very helpful in understanding the primary research questions of the research.

5 Presentation and Discussion

This chapter presents analyses using both acquired quantitative and qualitative data and provides relevant discussion and assessment about the role of Bangsamoro identity in the Mindanao conflict and the sustainability of the current peace agreement (the Bangsamoro Organic Law). As discussed in Chapter 3, identity is a broad concept and can have different definitions. In this thesis, the concept of Social Identity Theory (SIT) is mainly tackled and used as a basis for linking the Bangsamoro identity and the Mindanao conflict. In particular, the role of religious identity and ethnicity in the Mindanao conflict is investigated (Section 5.1). The relation between the religious identity and the conflict (Section 5.1.1) is assessed and discussed based on the ideologies of different Moro Islamic groups and factions, and how these groups have responded and acted towards the government. Although the Mindanao conflict is a complex and multi-faceted problem, it is not surprising that religious identity issue is one of the main causes because Bangsamoro people are minorities in the Philippines. Therefore, different militant groups and factions are formed with a single mission of isolating and detaching themselves from the Philippine government to practice freely their Islamic religion. Among others, active involvement of two main militant groups, MILF and MNLF, is the main problem of the Philippine government. The detailed historical background of these active groups is discussed in Section 1.3. Zooming into the Bangsamoro region, ethnicity-related conflict is prevalent, which relates to land dispute, clan clashes or *rido*, and violence induced by extremists (Section 5.1.2). In this ethnicity-related conflict, the main actors are intercommunal or different ethnic groups, who can potentially escalate and maintain the dynamics of Mindanao conflict. The repeating creation of factions, including the two main nationalist revolutionary groups (MILF and MNLF) and the extremists, raises important questions: “How well are the goals and mission of these different revolutionary groups align? Will their misaligned point of views hinder the ongoing peace process?”. These questions, which are closely related to the research questions in this thesis, are addressed in this chapter. In addition, this chapter provides a better understanding about the nature of the conflict and the fate of ongoing peace process.

5.1 Role of identity in the Moro conflict

The emplacement of Comprehensive Agreement for Bangsamoro (CAB) by the former Philippine President Benigno Aquino III in 2014 aims to establish self-governing territory for

Islamic Moro people under the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), the now so-called Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). It is called ‘Bangsamoro’ (‘Moro nation’ when translated to English) to indicate a unified identity of Muslim people. When this law was created, the Philippine government anticipated that this could end the conflict between the government and the MILF and/or MNLF, and the intergroup conflict between Christians and Muslims. Before the BOL is institutionalized in 2018, an increase in both the number of conflict incidents and deaths is evident (Figure 5), which is considered as part of the transition process towards self-governance (Lara, 2019). During which, identity issue is one of the main drivers of the Mindanao conflict next to the shadow economy (Figure 6a). Notably, the number of identity-related conflicts and deaths rapidly increases from 2015 to 2017 (Figure 6), which slightly exceeding the number of deaths associated with the political issue (Figure 6b). A significant number of deaths in 2017 associated with the siege in Marawi is mainly driven by both political and identity issues. Although the number of deaths and conflict incidents is gradually decreasing after 2017, still the count is higher than the previous years. Importantly, the identity issue consistently plays an important role in those conflicts that are related to religion (Section 5.1.1) and ethnicity (Section 5.1.2).

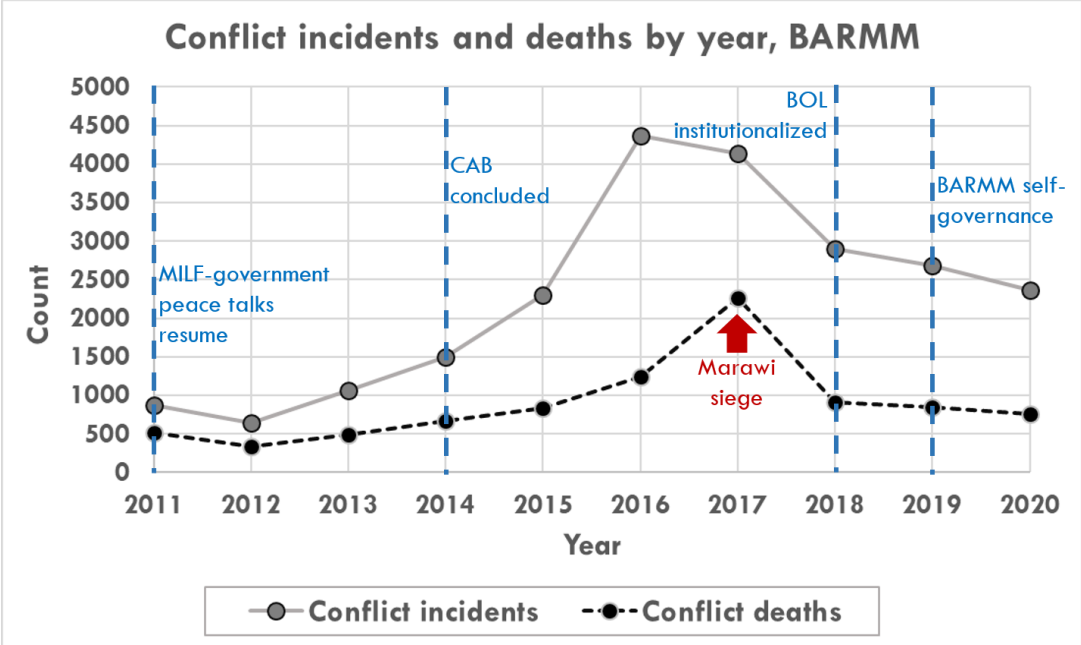


Figure 5. Temporal evolution of Mindanao conflict as reflected by the number of incidents and deaths from 2011 to 2020. Year with important activity related to peace process is indicated by blue dashed vertical line. The red arrow indicates for 2017 Marawi siege. Data is retrieved from Conflict Alert Database (*Conflict Alert*). Abbreviations: MILF = Moro Islamic Liberation Front, CAB = Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, BOL = Bangsamoro Organic Law, BARMM = Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

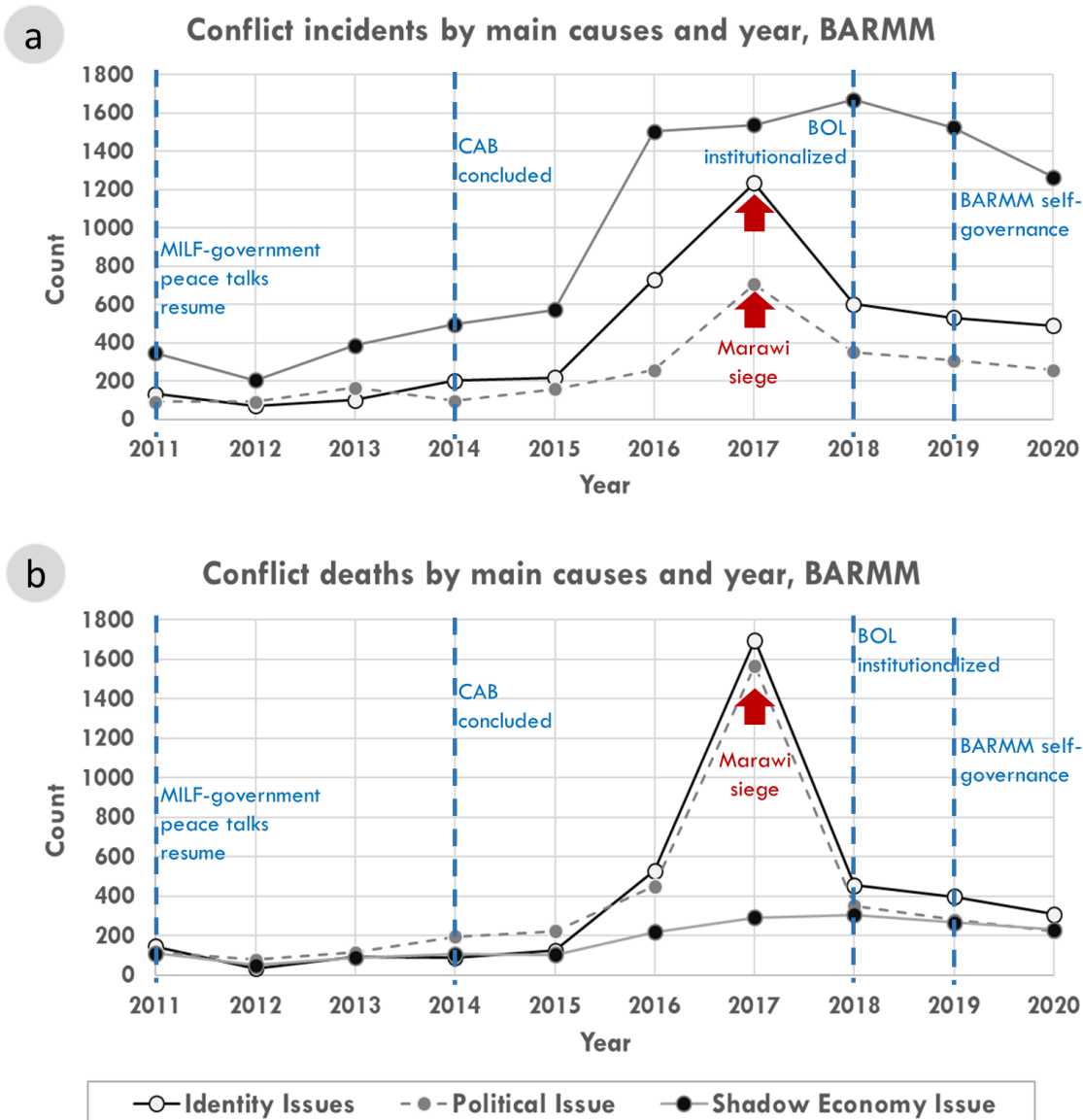


Figure 6. Temporal evolution of Mindanao conflict (a) incidents and (b) deaths by three main causes: identity, political, and shadow economy issues from 2011 to 2020. Abbreviations are in Figure 5.

As defined before, the Mindanao conflict is the protracted conflict between the Moros, a separatist group, and the government of the predominantly Christian southern region of the Philippines. This conflict is widely recognized as the second-longest in history next to the Sudanese conflict. The Mindanao has been the site of the most protracted, severe and violent insurgency in the Philippines, which have been characterized by both ethnic and religious dimensions. The Mindanao conflict is influenced significantly by two robust social constructs that shape the separatists' identity and significance. Undoubtedly, Islam and ethnicity are the most prominent pillars in this context as they function as identity markers with both internal

and external implications (Rupprecht, 2014). The Mindanao conflict is characterized by the presence of three primary identities, namely the Christians, Muslims or Moros, and Indigenous Peoples (IP) (as discussed in Section 1.3). These different major identities are traditionally defined by their distinct theological and sociocultural traditions. The concept of ethno-religious identification highlights the significance of religion as the fundamental basis of one's ethnic identity. The prevailing belief among individuals is that the three ethno-religious identities have differences, which essentially create the perception of distinct racial categories and an imperceptible obstacle that exists between them. Furthermore, the ethno-religious identity is perceived as the primary motivating factor for the prolonged Mindanao conflict that is primarily driven by all their respective social, cultural, political, economic, and other interactions and relationships.

The relationship between the Islam and Christianity in the Philippines has been characterized by a perception of enmity and rivalry, rather than a collaboration, in the pursuit of peace in the region of Mindanao. As per Larousse (2001), the religious affiliations of both Christians and Muslims are deeply ingrained in their self-identity. Beyond their religious affiliations as Muslims and Christians, they are identified based on a profound spiritual level. According to Gowing (1977), there exists a profound level of complexity in the relationship between Moros and Christians, which he terms as the *Christian problem for the Moros* and the *Moros problem for the Christians*. The *Christian Problem for the Moros* involves the eradication of the religion and culture of the minority groups – the Moros, as the sole means of achieving national cohesion. This mainly involves incorporating Muslims into the societal, economic, and political fabric of the nation. However, Moros' resistance against national integration and solidarity is tremendously strong, which resulted in armed conflict and unrest in the regions of Mindanao and Sulu. The Moros are engaged in a struggle against the Philippine government that aims to attain autonomy in their ancestral territory, which would enable them to adhere to the tenets of Islam. This protracted conflict consequently impedes progress in peace processes and regional development.

5.1.1 Role of religious identity in the Mindanao conflict: Islam versus Christianity

Religion is the oldest type of group and social identity, where religious beliefs form a specific identity and allow an individual to belong in a community with the same beliefs. It is a powerful source of identification, which may lead to a conflict and violence when such

identification is deprived or removed from an individual or group of individuals. This creation of conflict that may involve violence is bound to happen because identity provides a purpose and direction in individual’s life.

Conflict and religion are very much connected. This connection is depicted in Figure 7 where religious identity plays a significant role in the Mindanao conflict. The mutual connection between religion and conflict can be understood by looking at the role of religion as either a “motivating component” or a “legitimizing component” in a conflict. Religion serves as a “motivating component” in a conflict when it is something that explicitly encourages and demands violence and war. On the other hand, religion is considered a “legitimizing

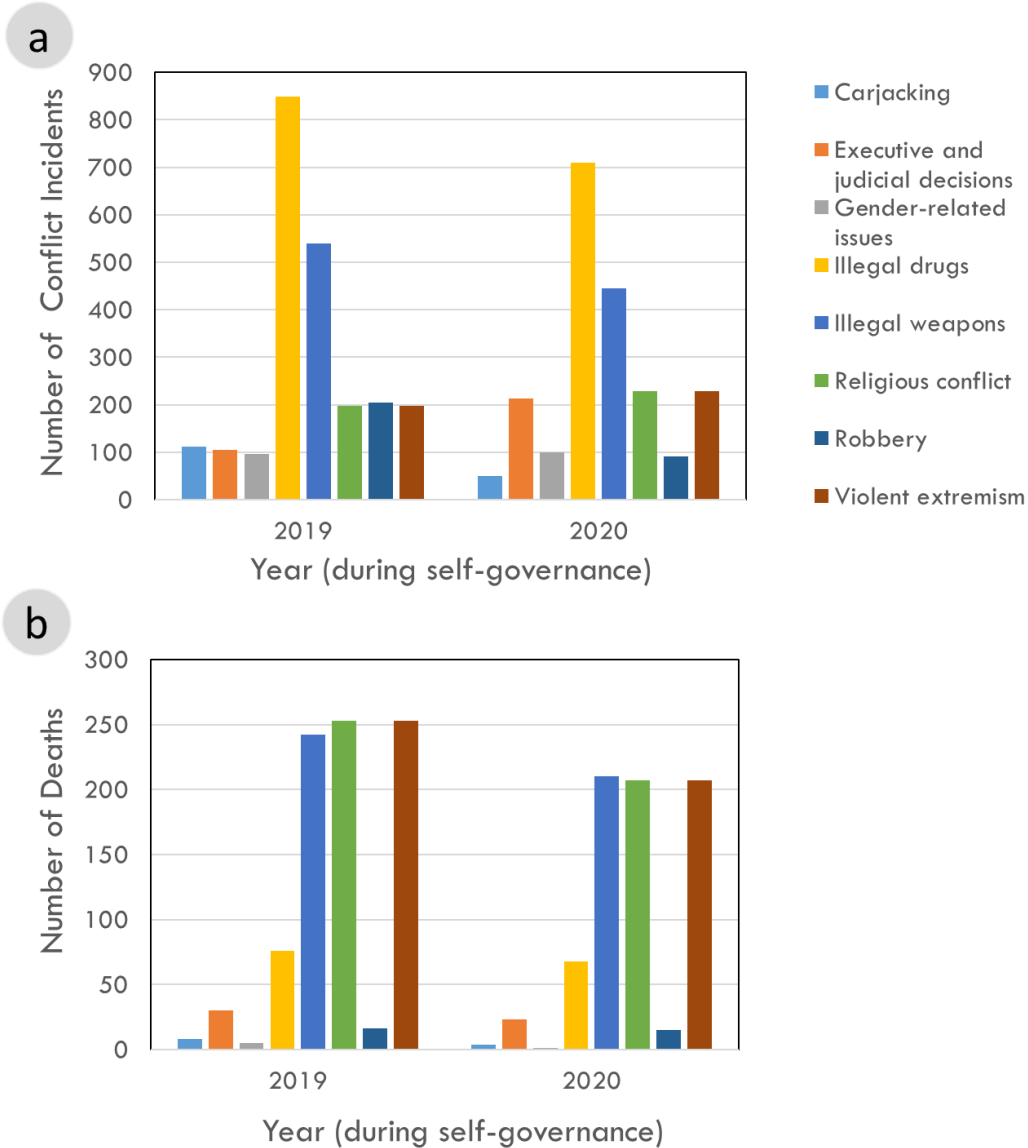


Figure 7. Specific causes for conflict (a) incidents and (b) deaths during the recent self-governance in 2019 and 2020.

component” when a conflict is justified as a means to address injustice and wrongdoings. In the Mindanao conflict, the role of religion is not straightforward. Religion can either be a motivating component or legitimizing component, or even both.

When the Philippine-American government transferred some Christian settlers from Luzon to Mindanao, which results in claiming lands and rights to the resources in Mindanao, the Moro Islamic minorities felt threatened. This unfair treatment by the Philippine government, which may root from government’s hidden agenda and/or power and control over the untameable Mindanao, clearly results in land dispute and displacements of Moro people. In addition, this poses endangerment of the Islamic religion, during which Islamic people were limited to practice their religion and freedom. This scenario is a clear example of a religion as a “legitimizing component”. Therefore, the Islamic religion in the very Catholic country, Philippines, is expected to play an important role in the Mindanao conflict and is still does. In fact, religion-related conflicts (green bar in Figure 7) are still significant during the recent years, directly after the BOL was institutionalized.

5.1.1.1 Fostering nationalism: ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’

The religious identification of Moro community as Islamic group is a community with rich culture, tradition and beliefs different from Catholic Filipinos, which all foster nationalism. Such nationalistic point of view seems to create exclusiveness, where non-Moro individuals particularly the Christian Filipinos are unwelcomed in Mindanao. In the interview of the MNLF chairman Nur Misuari by Al Jazeera Media Network (Misauri, 2013), he emphasized that the organization aims to acquire freedom from both Philippine and Malaysian colonialism, and that they are ready to risk lives to acquire such freedom. These words are strong evidence of being an extreme nationalistic and patriotic individual, who can dehumanize and ready to kill people who do not belong in the Moro community. In contrast to the justification that the Moros are fighting for, this nationalism indicates that religion is a “motivating component” for an occurrence of war and violence. Whether all Moro people truly seek for freedom from the Philippine government or merely a false presumption or just personal-driven goals of the militant leaders, this strong nationalistic point of view had, has and will take part of the existing societal conflict, which is significantly associated with religion.

Religious identity is a significant concern due to the diverse concepts of identification and unique ways of living that are rooted in the distinct religions of each group. In the context of the interplay between Muslims and Christians, religious affiliations tend to adopt a political and nationalistic character, thereby rekindling longstanding hostilities to advance their respective interests. The articulation of distinct origin and identity between Muslims and Christians is a dominant feature of the historical relationship, which is mainly characterized by the concept of colonialism. The inevitable encounter between Christians and Muslims started during the Spanish invasion. The process of colonization by Spain led to an increase in Christianization in the Philippines, while concurrently resulting in a decrease in adherence to Islam among the Moro population. The conflict between the Spanish conquerors and the pre-existing community in the Muslim-dominated regions of Mindanao and Sulu has been commonly known as the "Moro Wars". The "Moro Wars" was mainly driven by the strategic plan and policy to convert the Muslim inhabitants to Christians, which of course resulted in a tremendous resistance by the Muslims. In consequence, Spanish conquerors were very compelled to act on this resistance (Majul, 1985).

5.1.1.2 Deprivation from self and religious rights and own resources

The significance of religion in the culture of Mindanao cannot be overstated. For a considerable time period, the Philippine government declined to acknowledge the presence of the Islamic law within the country, particularly in the Mindanao region. The Moro community expressed displeasure about this matter because they have perceived that Islamic Law holds significant value in their cultural practices. Moreover, Muslim Filipinos have historically been subject to inadequate treatment, insufficient recognition, and a lack of modifications in the educational curriculum in public schools. For instance, Christian literatures and educational materials were enforced as compulsory reading materials for Bangsamoro youth in public educational institutions, alongside the utilization of inflammatory anti-Muslim illustrations and scenarios that are discriminating in nature. In addition, the Philippine government allocated relatively fewer resources towards the socioeconomic advancement of Moro community. Remarkably, there was a notable disparity in wealth between the Muslim community and the Christian community in Mindanao according to Kapahi and Tañada (2018).

It is a fact that majority of the Philippine population is Roman Catholics or Christians. Therefore, it is inevitable that the government is well-represented by Christians whose goals are apparently geared towards Christians, and may have neglected the needs of minorities, particularly the Moros. In fact, most of the Bangsamoro region receives very less support from the Philippine government in terms of state services, except for the areas where Philippine Air Forces put up their camps, for example in Lanao (Özerdem & Podder, 2012). This consequently segregates people, magnifies the differences, amplifies the feeling of being an outcast, and endangers the ethnic and religious identification.

Thus, insurgence is expected to arise again and again because of unfair treatment towards Muslim Filipinos by the Philippine government. Since the Bangsamoro seeks for autonomy, it is expected that the Bangsamoro government has to thrive for their own development and economy. It is notable though that even before the BOL was institutionalized, the shadow economy is very rampant (Figure 6) where political elites, clans and violent extremists are commonly the main actors (Strachan, 2015). This problem may have started because the community have received little support from the Philippine government. As anticipated, the powerful clans and political elites are greedy individuals who want to retain their power, wealth and control over their respective territories by doing illegal activities. Since this intercommunal problem has been strongly and deeply rooted, this cannot be solved overnight through a peace process and/or self-governance. In fact, trading of illegal weapons and drugs is still a main problem that the current Bangsamoro government is facing (Figure 7). Such rebellious action towards the Bangsamoro government may indicate that these main actors do not agree with the self-governance led by MILF or they do not want to give up what they used to do and have.

5.1.2 Role of ethnicity in the conflict: minority versus majority in Mindanao

Ethnicity is a socially constructed concept that is predicated on a variety of factors, including but not limited to shared historical experiences, geographic origins, cultural practices, linguistic traditions, and belief systems. The notion that ethnic groups can be considered as potential candidates for nationhood is a fundamental rationale for establishing a sovereign nation-state, as posited by Suhrke and Noble (1977). In the study of Gutierrez et al. (2000) about the development of the Bangsamoro identity in Mindanao, he asserts that the Bangsamoro community can be considered a nation within a nation. However, looking into

the detailed structure of Bangsamoro as a collective nation, it does not constitute a homogenous ethnic group. Its ethnic identity has been reconstructed and assumed to be homogenous with the same goal in response to the political rise of the separatist movement in the 1970s. Although the Bangsamoro people aspire to have their own state as emphasized by their insurgent groups, they are willing to accept the constraints imposed by historical circumstances that are beyond their control.

5.1.2.1 The struggles of tri-people: Moros, Indigenous Peoples and Christians

The past, present and potentially future relationship between Islam and Christianity has been and will be influenced by the effects of colonization, leading to the development of distinct identities in the Philippines. The tri-people (Moros, Indigenous Peoples and Christians) are on the brink of engaging in a conflict due to the influence of the colonial mindset. The ethno-religious identity pervades various dimensions of both the individual and society.

The tension observed between Muslims and Christians or tri-people groups is attributed to their respective religious identity, which upholds the right to self-determination. Religion constitutes the fundamental basis of ethno-religious identity. Belonging to a specific religious community provides individuals with a profound sense of affiliation and fosters the development of both their communal and personal identities. Religion functions as a societal demarcation, as evidenced by the Christian, Moros, and Lumads encounter in the Mindanao conflict. Thus, the primary foundation of the conflict is related to religion and that the root of the conflict is mainly associated with the "Christians" (Baybado, 2020). In particular, the primary apprehension of the Moro community is related to the possibility of complete assimilation into a Filipino national identity, which is predominantly based on the Christian faith. Hence, the predicament faced by Muslim Filipinos is fundamentally linked to their ethnic, religious, and national identities. With this, the Moros have persisted and will continue in their struggle for independence from a perceived oppressive Christian Filipino colonialism, as long as their perception of the situation remains unchanged.

Within Mindanao, the Moros and Indigenous Peoples have persistently experienced political, economic, and cultural marginalization due to the colonial strategy, which was subsequently referred to as the policy of assimilation and integration. The Moros and Indigenous Peoples have reported experiencing historical marginalization and exclusion in various domains,

including political, economic, and cultural spheres. Additionally, they have perceived that the central government exhibits favoritism towards the Christian majority in terms of economic development and religious freedom. The Moros and Lumads (the latter are a subgroup of Indigenous Peoples) perceive the term "Christian" as not only encompassing the Christian populace but also the policies of the central government. The Moros' right to self-determination is intrinsically linked to Islam and the Islamic way of life, whereas the Lumads' right to self-determination is rooted in their culture and indigenous way of life.

5.1.2.2 Different sub-ethnic groups and their role in the Mindanao conflict

Prior to the advent of Islam in Mindanao, a diverse array of linguistic communities coexisted in the region, which are subsequently classified as tribes by Bangsamoro scholars (Jubair, 1999). The Mindanao populace is constituted by thirteen distinct ethnolinguistic factions or tribes, with the Tausug, Maguindanao and Maranao tribes being the three most populous and dominant among them. During the pre-colonial era, the region of Mindanao was home to several sultanates, each of which functioned as a discrete political entity. During this pre-colonial era, Islam was introduced to Mindanao through commercial trading. There were two prominent sultanates – Maguindanao Sultanate and Sulu Sultanate that were established by the three dominant tribes (Tausugs, Maranao and Maguindanao), which were geographically distant from each other. According to Frake (1998), the Tausugs are distributed across different regions of the Sulu Archipelago and the Zamboanga Peninsula (see Figure 1 or Figure 9), together with other sub-ethnic groups such as the Sama and the Yakan. The Maranao (read as M'ranaw) community inhabited areas in proximity to Lake Lanao and the coastal regions of the Lanao provinces, whereas the Maguindanao (read as Magindanw'n) populace thrived in the riverine plains of the Cotabato region, encompassing the present-day Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces (see Figure 1 or Figure 9).

During the 16th century, the downstream banks of the Pulangi river in Cotabato witnessed the emergence of a Maguindanao Sultanate. However, this sultanate soon declined and became obsolete (Warren, 2002). In contrast, the Sulu Sultanate, which emerged in the 15th century where the Tausug people played a pivotal role in the leadership of the Sulu Sultanate until its eventual collapse two centuries later, which was attributed to the American occupation of the Philippines (Warren, 1981). The gradual dissolution of the strict tribal boundaries among various ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines can be attributed to intermarriages, cross-

community migration, and the implementation of a formalized national education program by the government. Despite of these assimilations and attempts for national integration, these sub-ethnic groups have predominantly retained their ancestral languages, territories and cultural heritage, thereby preserving their ancestral identity.

5.1.2.3 Ethnicity and territories

The invocation of identities in the context of territorial disputes may not necessarily be predominantly religious in nature, but rather rooted in ethnic affiliations. Chandra (2006) and Gurr and Moore (1997) argue that the ethnic identification is a social construct that fosters a sense of unity among group members through a combination of shared cultural values, a shared heritage, and a shared history. According to Chandra (2006), the most comprehensive subcategory of ethnic identity is the classification that encompasses characteristics related to ancestry.

Ethnic identities hold significant implications for two crucial aspects of territorial conflicts, namely territory and religious identities, owing to their associations with ancestry and descent (Macapagal, Montiel, & Canuday, 2018). There exists a close relationship between ethnic identity and territory (Buendia, 2005). Individuals sharing a common ancestor or lineage have a tendency to reside in close proximity to one another, leading to the formation of ethnic groups within pre-established territorial boundaries (Chandra, 2006). Territorial discourses have the capacity to evoke ethnic identities (Macapagal, Montiel, & Canuday, 2018).

According to Gurr and Moore (1997), the politicized ethnic identity emerges when a reference group shares a combination of common ancestry, historical experiences and cultural traits. According to Chandra (2006) assertion, the notion of shared ancestry is significant for the politicized ethnic identities, but not for the politicized religious identities. The concept of shared ancestry as a means of ethnic identification can be broadened to include membership in a common tribe, language group, nation-state and/or religious community. This politicized ethnic identity would be activated and consequently creates conflict either against a state or other groups when the reference group makes demands and raises concerns about their collective interests that are discriminated and/or neglected.

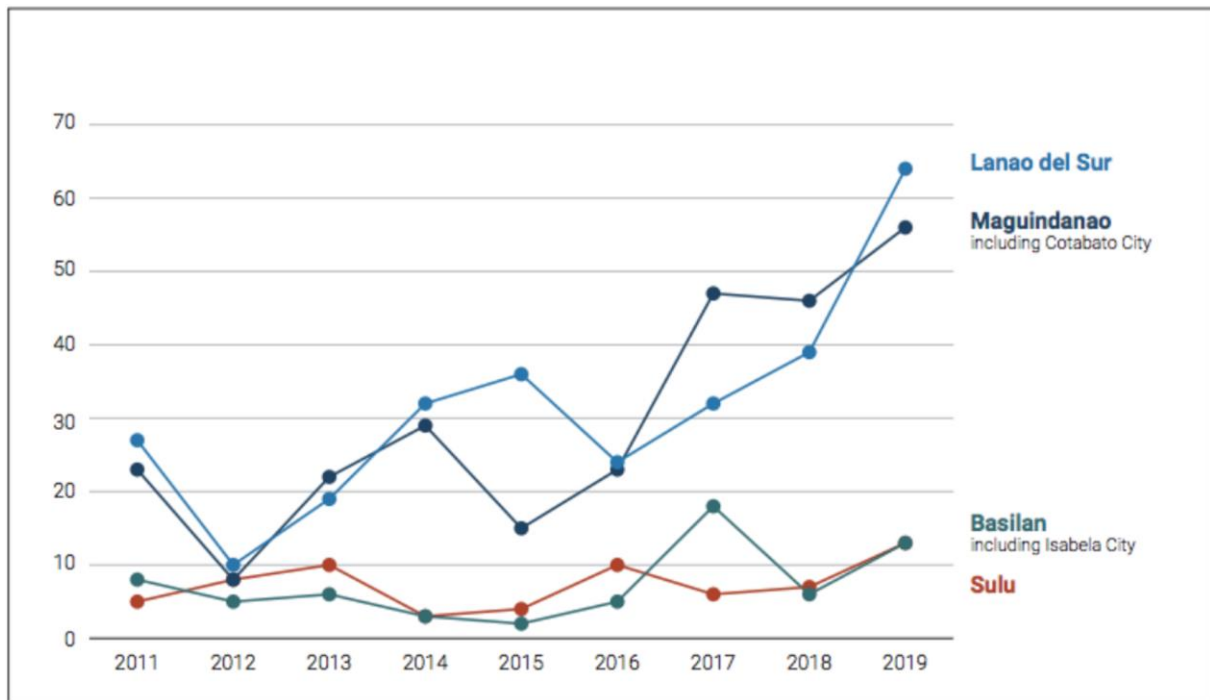


Figure 8. Clan Feuds by Province and Year. In terms of ethnicity, Lanao del Sur is inhabited with Maranao ethnic group, Maguindanao is with Maguindanaoan ethnic group, and Sulu and Basilan are with Tausug ethnic group. The data plotted is taken from Conflict Alert (2020).

Moreover, it is imperative that a geographic classification is accompanied by an ancestral origin, which essentially determines the ethnic identity. Macapagal et al. (2018) expanded this notion by highlighting that groups with established historical connections to the disputed territory or region may exhibit a stronger inclination towards invoking ethnic identities, in contrast to migrants or new settler communities. This is not surprising then that the individuals who identify as Muslims in Mindanao – collectively called as Moros, are more likely to maintain a stronger connection to their ethnic identities compared to Christians who have migrated to the area.

Within the Bangsamoro, geographic classification and ethnic identity also play an important role in maintaining and bursting the existing conflict. According to the report from Conflict Alert, there have been a total of 689 clan disputes within the Bangsamoro region between 2011 and 2019. Breaking this number into main provinces or ethnic groups – Tausugs in Sulu and Basilan, Maranao in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanaoans in Maguindanao (defined in Section 4.1.2.3), it is apparent that within each ethnic group or province, clan feuds or *rido* are increasing significantly, particularly in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao (Figure 8). This internal issue would certainly impose a great problem in sustaining the ongoing peace process

if the root cause, which probably related to land disputes, would not be solved by the Bangsamoro government.

5.1.2.4 Militant groups and their ethnic identities

The protracted Moro insurgency in Mindanao also called as Mindanao conflict has persisted since the early 1970s and is regarded as one of the most enduring insurgent movements in Asia. The Moro insurgency has been marked by the involvement of multiple rebel factions, among which the MNLF, MILF and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) as prominent actors. The prolonged dispute between the Philippine government and the Moro insurgents, which is considered as one of the deadliest ethnic clashes in Asia, has caused the demise of around 120,000 people and the relocation of two million individuals (Quimpo, 2016). Initially, the common objective of the active militant groups was to establish a sovereign nation (within Philippine nation) for the Moro community. The Moro community is one of the thirteen predominant Muslim ethnicities that inhabit the region of Mindanao and its adjacent islands. The notion that the Bangsamoro is comprised of diverse Islamized communities with different ethnic groups, and that their active leaders, Nur Misuari for MNLF and Salamat Hashim for MILF, have strong ties to their ethnic roots suggest that the ethnic division has played a significant role in the formation of factions, such as the formation of MILF from the MNLF. The ethnic division may indicate that the “Bangsamoro” as a nation and a notion is an incomplete and a weak unifying force for the diverse Moro factions. Collectively and content-wise, the active players of the Moro insurgence who push for independence and autonomy clearly exhibit a lack of strength because the Muslim population identifies based on their respective clans and ethnic groups in addition to their collective Muslim identity. Thus, the ethnic dimensions of the Mindanao conflict have to be emphasized and considered, albeit with a tendency to diminish the broader interconnections that underpin its secessionist politics.

The establishment of a unique identity for any secessionist movement by the opposing party, for instance the Philippine government, is imperative because this provides necessary justifications to frame, legitimize and sanction the separatist campaign and the ethical authority of its corresponding leaders. Generally, the ideologies of any secessionist movement are mainly centralized on creating an "alternative community" that opposes the existing nation or state. Although the Bangsamoro sub-ethnic groups possess distinct characteristics and utilize different dialects, they altogether have struggled for autonomy from the tentacles of the

Philippine government. Despite of the same struggle, creation of several factions is prevalent. Rupprecht (2014) identifies that a significant factor contributing to the increasing fragmentation of the Bangsamoro separatist movement is driven by an internal ethnicity issue. When a governing body or administration exhibits preferential treatment towards a particular group and confers group entitlements based on group identity and rights, racial tensions can be intensified that fosters ethnic strife. A good example for this is the disruption of the previously peaceful state of affairs in Mindanao by the MNLF during the ongoing peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF. The MNLF expressed their discontent of being excluded and insisted that the Philippine government must uphold their previous peace accord that was established in 1996. The MNLF is mainly supported by Tausugs while the MILF is fully supported by Maguindanaoans. If this fight between the two big militant groups or between Tausugs and Maguindanaoans would continue, ethnic division based on self-determination and cultural separatism will be institutionalized regionally and the current self-governance may not succeed. Considering the presence of thirteen ethnolinguistic groups within the Muslim community in Mindanao, it is worth exploring the potential barriers that may impede other groups from asserting similar claims for entitlements.

5.2 Peace-building in Mindanao

The historical peace-building for Mindanao conflict rooted from the assumption that Bangsamoro or Moro is the identity for Muslim Mindanao. However, religion and ethnicity (including minor tribal groups) are important pillars for the sustainability of the Mindanao conflict. Thus, these two pillars have to be considered when constructing and implementing a peace process agreement through Right to Self Determination (RSD) and jurisdiction for territories and natural resources for instance as shown in Figure 9. However, it is important to note that RSD has to be practiced within the entire community, the Bangsamoro region, and not by individual ethnic group within the Bangsamoro community (as in Section 3.1.4). If this is not practiced or if some of the Bangsamoro people felt detached, this would certainly pose a problem in advancing the reconciliation process. Similarly, when there are circumstances that are not welcomed by the Bangsamoro people, a shift in the current setting would occur because the people may reconsider and rethink the goals of the conflict (Section 3.2.3).

5.2.1 The current peace agreement: Bangsamoro Organic Law and the establishment of BARMM

The enactment of the Republic Act No. 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL; previously known as Bangsamoro Basic Law) aims to establish an autonomous region for Islamic ethnic communities residing in Mindanao known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The establishment of BARMM is an example of a federal system, which offers both advantages and disadvantages that may provide insights to the Philippine government and nation whether to make a shift to this new form of government. In the BOL, individuals who are identified as Muslims in Mindanao are recognized as a collective entity known as the Bangsamoro or Moro nation as stated in Article II Section 1:

“Those who, at the advent of the Spanish colonization, were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands, whether of mixed or of full blood, shall have the right to identify themselves, their spouses and descendants, as Bangsamoro”

In addition, the BOL aims to mitigate intergroup conflict between the Christian and Muslim communities in Mindanao by instituting specific governance and identity provisions such as territorial jurisdiction stated in Article III Section 2 which states that *the Bangsamoro’s territorial jurisdiction subject to a plebiscite to be conducted not earlier than 90 days or later than 150 days after*

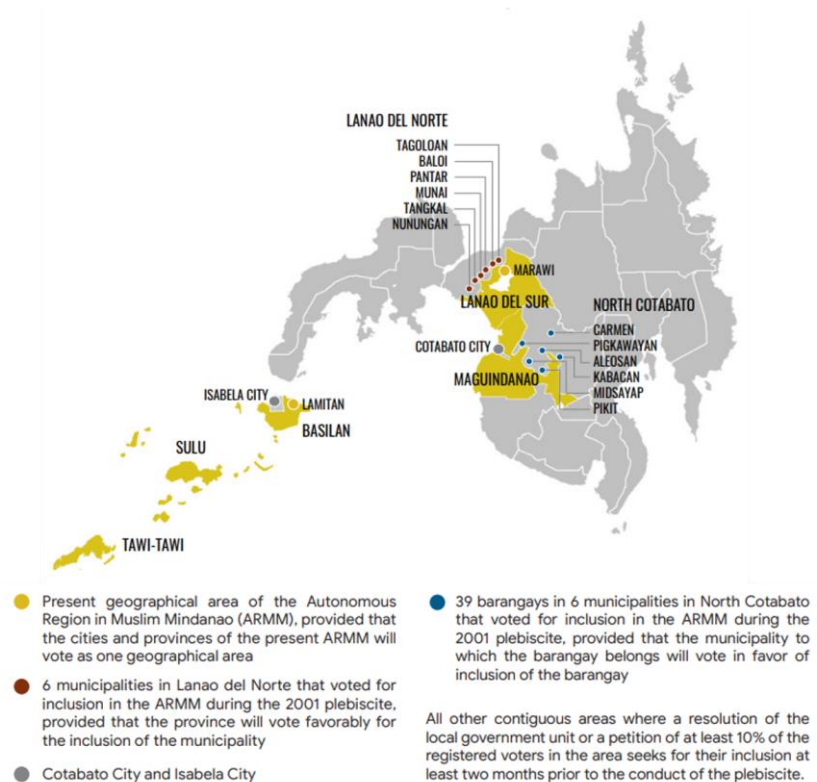


Figure 9. The Bangsamoro's territorial jurisdiction (from Ramos and Alhambra (2018), Intersect Quick Facts).

the effectivity of RA No. 11054, shall be composed of the areas shown in Figure 9.

As for the inland waters, the Bangsamoro government has to preserve and manage these waters (Article III Section 3). But inland waters used for energy outside its territory will be co-managed with the National Government through the Department of Energy (DOE).

Article V Section 2 in the BOL enumerates all the powers that Bangsamoro Government has and is summarized in Figure 10. Among the listed powers that Bangsamoro Government has, human rights and indigenous peoples' rights are very important since these are closely link to

<p>POWERS OF THE BARRM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ administration of justice ▪ administrative organization ▪ agriculture, livestock, and food security ▪ ancestral domain and natural resources ▪ barter trade and countertrade ▪ budgeting ▪ business name registration ▪ cadastral land survey ▪ civil service ▪ classification of public lands ▪ cooperatives and social entrepreneurship ▪ creation, division, merger, abolition or alteration of boundaries of municipalities and barangays ▪ creation of government-owned or controlled corporations and pioneer firms ▪ creation of sources of revenues ▪ cultural exchange, and economic and technical cooperation ▪ culture and language ▪ customary laws ▪ development programs and laws for women, labor, the youth, the elderly, the differently-abled, and indigenous peoples ▪ disaster risk reduction and management ▪ ecological solid waste management and pollution control ▪ economic zones, industrial centers, and free ports ▪ education and skills training ▪ eminent domain ▪ environment, parks, forest management, wildlife, and nature reserves conservation ▪ fishery, marine, and aquatic resources ▪ grants and donations ▪ <i>Hajj and Umrah</i> ▪ health 	<p>ARTICLE V SECTION II enumerates the powers of the Bangsamoro Government "without prejudice to the general supervision of the President of the Republic of the Philippines." These powers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ housing and human settlements ▪ humanitarian services and institutions ▪ human rights ▪ indigenous peoples' rights ▪ inland waters ▪ inland waterways for navigation ▪ Islamic banking and finance ▪ labor, employment, and occupation ▪ libraries and museums, and historical, cultural and archaeological sites ▪ loans, credits, and other forms of indebtedness ▪ mechanisms for consultations for women and marginalized sectors ▪ people's organizations ▪ power sector investments ▪ public utilities' operations ▪ public works and infrastructure ▪ quarantine regulations ▪ registration of births, marriages, and deaths (copies to be furnished the Philippine Statistics Authority) ▪ regulation of the manufacture and distribution of food, drinks, drugs, and tobacco ▪ science and technology, research councils and scholarship programs ▪ social services, social welfare, and charities ▪ sports and recreation ▪ technical cooperation for human resource development ▪ tourism development ▪ trade and industry ▪ urban and rural planning development ▪ urban land reform and land use ▪ water supply and services, flood control, and irrigation systems
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Figure 10. Powers of the Bangsamoro Government (from Ramos and Alhambra (2018), Intersect Quick Facts).

Right to Self Determination. The Philippine National Government has to hold all the powers, functions and responsibilities that are not granted to Bangsamoro, which includes foreign affairs, defense and security. This means that the Bangsamoro is not permitted to have its own army. As to the hierarchal structure, the head of the Bangsamoro government is called the Chief Minister with 80 members of the parliament who are elected by the Bangsamoro people. The first parliamentary elections were postponed from 2022 to 2025 by the Former President Rodrigo Duterte, thereby extending the political transition in the BARMM. Alongside with the Chief Minister is two Deputy Chief Ministers from other two-sub-regions different from that of the Chief Minister. To ensure that national laws are still executed by the Bangsamoro government, the President of the Philippines has to supervise the Bangsamoro government while delegating some of the governmental powers and responsibilities.

5.2.2 BOL and Bangsamoro as collective identity

The BOL's provisions pertaining to the allocation of wealth and power in the Bangsamoro's designated territory have resulted in an anticipated opposition from numerous Christian Filipinos. Surprisingly, in addition to the opposition from Christian settlers, an internal resistance within the Moro community emerged before the final enactment of BOL in 2018. Montiel et al. (2016) reported that in the western region of the Bangsamoro territories, the BOL was obstructed by Moro leaders who claimed that they were excluded from the peace negotiations. Although the religious discord between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao has often been portrayed as a religious conflict, the existence of differences in tribal identities, such as the ethnic identities of the Moro people, can lead to internal and localized conflicts in the course of a peace process (Montiel, Macapagal, & Canuday, 2016).

The phenomenon of collective identity can arise from a variety of sources, ranging from a shared tribal or group affiliation to the collective expression of common beliefs, practices, or behaviors (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Klandermans, 2014). In Mindanao, the collective identity as Bangsamoro is essentially characterized by the shared territorial identity as Muslim Filipinos living in Mindanao. In particular, the notion of collective identification in the Bangsamoro region can be comprehended as "We are Tausugs/Maguindanaoans", which contradicts the individualistic identification of "I am a Tausug/Maguindanaoan" (Montiel et al., 2016).

During the period of societal transformation, such as the transition from ARMM to BARMM, the concept of collective identity serves as a potent determinant of social behavior because collective identity and the endorsement of social transformation initiatives are correlated (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Klandermans, 2014; Simon, et al., 1998; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Thus, in periods of turmoil, the collective identity of a group is a significant key element to explain the political actions undertaken by that group. According to Montiel et al. (2016), the probability of group members to engage in collective action is high when an implemented political process affects the group directly. For instance, an unequal power dynamic where one party holds a superior position while the other is a subordinate, can trigger a collective action driven by a collective identity. This is evident in the Bangsamoro government structure where the current Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim is an MILF member, while an MNLF member is one of the Deputy Ministers. In addition, the MNLF feels mistreated and discriminated by the Philippine government because the government seems to favor the MILF in their endeavour for autonomy. In such contexts, the strategic and agentic functions of collective identity are of critical importance.

Marginalized groups are often deprived of agency and power and consequently subjected to discrimination, while dominant groups afforded respect and power. As mentioned, the current peace process is being led by the MILF whose ties are with the Maguindanaon community, whereas the MNLF as subordinate is mainly tied with the Tausug community. In addition, although the collective identification of different ethnic groups gave support for the emplacement of BOL (direct effect, Figure 11), the Maguindanaoans (or MILF) who held the reins of the negotiations with the Philippine government, hold greater agentic power and functionalities in the current Bangsamoro government, while the Tausug collective identity (or MNLF counterpart) has little influence on the self-governance. This unequal power dynamic is a crucial situation that needs great attention and effort from both sides and even from other sub-regions of the Bangsamoro. If this continues, the effort of having Bangsamoro government and BOL will definitely dissolve for nothing. The Islamic ethnic groups' collective identities as "We are Maguindanaoans" or "We are Tausugs" may heightened and diminish the backing for BOL.

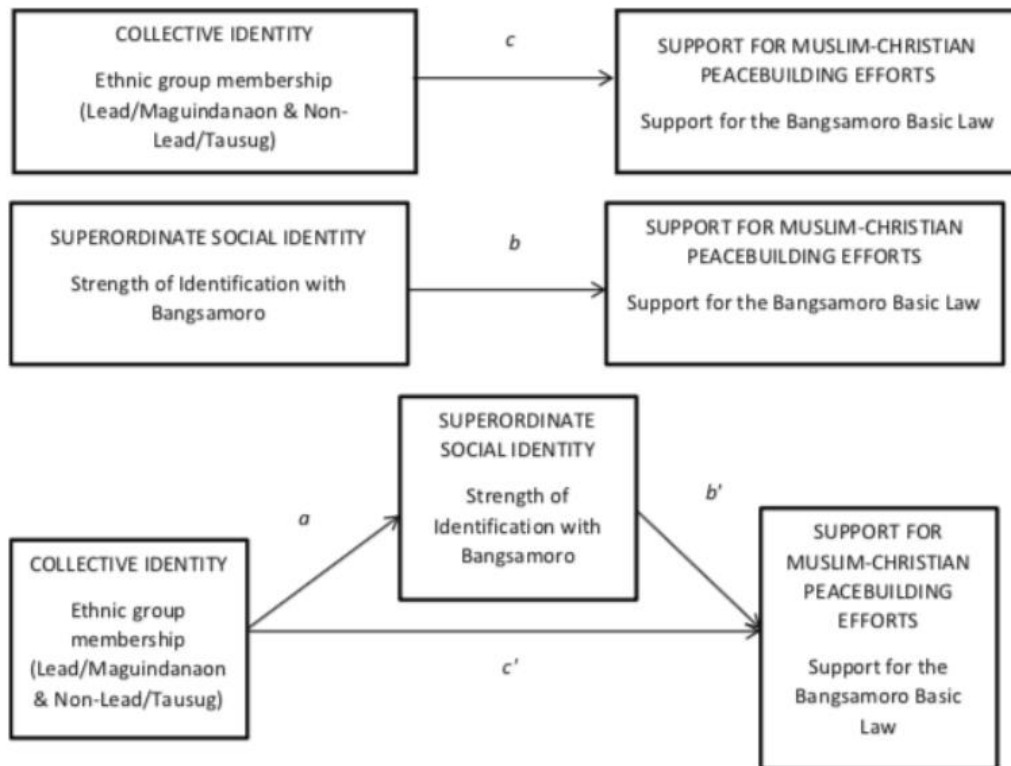


Figure 11. Hypothetical models for (top) direct and (bottom) indirect effects of collective identity on the peacebuilding process. (Figure taken from Montiel et al. (2016))

5.2.3 BOL and the impact of social identity

The collective identity defined by ethnicity may or may not support the peacebuilding efforts imposed by BOL as shown in Figure 11. In contrast, if superordinate social identity (referred here as Bangsamoro people) is more dominant, most (if not all) ethnic groups would show a full support for the peacebuilding process. Social identity constitutes an integral facet of an individual's personal identity that emanates from their social group, in contrast to collective identity that emanates from their broader community (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1974). In addition, the social identity is attributed to an individual's association with a specific social group, thus, it may or may not be affected by the association's ideologies. This means that individuals who are affiliated with a particular group do not necessarily exhibit a unified consciousness that can facilitate collective action. On the other hand, individuals who endorse collective action perceive their affiliation with the group as a crucial component of their (collective) identity (Montiel, Macapagal, & Canuday, 2016).

According to Friedman and McAdam (1992), individuals who possess a strong sense of identification with a particular group tend to exhibit a greater propensity towards endorsing

pro-group reform. Tajfel (1974) posits that the notion of personalized identification with a group is related to the concept of social identity, which asserts that an individual's social identity is derived from their membership in a social group. Within the various subgroups of the Moro community, individuals may assert their social identity by stating "I am a Tausug," as opposed to describing their collective identity as "We are Tausugs," as noted by Montiel et al. (2016). Thus, social identity plays a crucial role in an individual's decision to participate in a collective activity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1974). The research work of van Zomeren et al. (2008) have observed that group activities provide individuals with an opportunity to express their social identities. However, a transition from social to collective identity may occur when a group to which an individual belongs is subjected to oppression and exploitation, which in the process transforms the wider political issue into a personal offense (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). In this scenario, an individual is inclined to engage in a collective action due to the perception that their social identity could potentially be at risk. Indeed, when an individual's social identity is challenged, this typically elicits a response or reaction from the association or group where the individual belongs. Individuals who exhibit a sense of identification with a particular group are more inclined to participate in activities associated with that group, as compared to those who do not identify with the group. The understanding of individuals' participation in group activities is contingent upon their social identity.

According to Gaertner et al. (1999) and McKeown (2014), the term *superordinate identity* refers to a social identity that encompasses multiple subgroups. Thus, superordinate social identity come in handy in negotiations or discussion, which facilitates for a shared platform that mitigates bias between conflicting groups (Eggins, Haslam, & Reynolds, 2002). The individuals who identify themselves as superordinate social identity may have the capacity to facilitate social change, irrespective of their ethnic group membership. For example, the sub-ethnic groups in Mindanao that have undergone a religious transformation towards Islam exhibit a stronger identification as Muslim in comparison to Tausugs or Maguindanaoans. So, in the event of an opposition on the Muslim religious identity by Christians would certainly result in a unification of these ethnic groups, regardless of their distinct ethnic origins. In Montiel et al. (2016), the superior social identity is referred as the Bangsamoro affiliation (Figure 11). When an individual states that "I am affiliated with the Bangsamoro group", the individual is then considered to have a superordinate social identity component of their

overall identity. The establishment of robust connections with the Bangsamoro community can facilitate the consolidation of various Islamized ethnic factions, thereby enabling them to negotiate as a unified entity. Therefore, the degree of superordinate social identification with the Bangsamoro community can influence the level of support for the BOL (Montiel et al., 2016). This inclination to endorse the BOL as a strategy for promoting peace can be observed specifically in regions (i.e., Maguindanao) where most of the people identify themselves to have a Bangsamoro identity.

The mobilization and the urge of a group to show support for a social change are influenced by collective identity, which motivates the members of the group to act together against the perceived deprivation (Klandermans, 2014; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). At the same time, social identity exerts an influence on individuals, motivating them to take action in response to discrimination that they perceive as a direct attack on their social identity (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). In other words, any potential harm directed towards the organization can also pose a threat to its individual constituents. As a result, the group tends to seek methods to evade or alleviate the danger. The manifestation of a collective action is a result of the interplay between social and collective identities as illustrated by the regression paths b' and c' in Figure 11, respectively. Thus, if both the collective and superordinate social identities have adverse impacts on the level of BOL support in relation to the Mindanao peace process, and if the current peace process through BOL would not be successful, further investigation about the impact of these two identities on the multi-faceted Mindanao conflict has to be done. The capacity of Bangsamoro frontliners or the BOL supporters, for instance the MILF, to engage in negotiations with Christian representatives can be jeopardized by persistent inter-ethnic conflicts. In consequence, the collective ethnic identities would entirely supersede the Bangsamoro superordinate social identity and the support for the peacebuilding process would be impeded. The Maguindanaoans' ethnic affiliation with the MILF, who are the primary Bangsamoro negotiators, indicates that a greater number of Maguindanaoans have been inclined to endorse the BOL as peace-building process to other ethnic groups compared to the Tausugs. According to Montiel et al. (2016), when Moro individuals strongly identify themselves with the overarching Bangsamoro identity as superordinate social identity, which holds paramount importance in the Mindanao conflict, these individuals would likely support and endorse the BOL, irrespective of their ethnic origins.

5.2.4 Is BOL sustainable?

The historical peacebuilding processes are focused on training and workshops that aim to strengthen the cultural and religious understanding between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao. Clearly, these peacebuilding initiatives were not working and will not work because there are several and severe root causes. The concurrent religion-related and ethnicity related divisions are driven by both collective and social identities and political factors. With the current BOL and the Bangsamoro government as federal system, maybe there is a significant chance for the peace process to sustain. In the BOL, identification as Bangsamoro is well defined and emphasized. For this BOL to be fully emplaced, most ethnic constituents of the Bangsamoro region signed and provided their full support. This clearly implies that the superordinate social Bangsamoro identity is of great importance to all ethnic groups and that this right of self-determination can be the key to have sustainable peace in Mindanao. However, targeting this specific self-determination based on religion may just address the Muslim-Christian conflict. Thus, neglecting the needs and discriminating the other ethnic groups may impede the peace process, where these ethnic groups may work together to fight for their rights as what happened during the martial law in the presidential term of Former President Ferdinand Marcos, and of course in the protracted Mindanao conflict.

Recently, the Bangsamoro is designated with powers, functions and responsibilities to govern their region. With this, the Bangsamoro identity as a collective identity, unites the Bangsamoro people. However, in the current structure of the Bangsamoro government, the appointed Chief Minister is represented by an MILF member Murad Ebrahim, and not from the rival group MNLF. In addition, the parliament may potentially be composed of mostly MILF members after the first elections. If there is imbalance of power across the Bangsamoro government between the different militant groups and ethnic groups, this may pose danger for inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts.

The first parliamentary elections in the BARMM were postponed by the Former President Rodrigo Duterte from 2022 to 2025 to synchronize with the national elections. Therefore, extending the political transition in BARMM for another three years. In 2025, the BARMM will fully practice its self-governance. In the current transitional government led by ex-rebels (MILF and MNLF), the extension brought two reactions. The transitional government and the MILF supporters are enthusiastic with the extension, while the rest of the Bangsamoro

communities are frustrated with the slow implementation of the peace process. As for the transitional government that actually requested for an extension of six years from an initial schedule of three years, the extension gives them time to create regional institutions and draft legislation to govern the Bangsamoro. In addition, this six-year time frame may be sufficient to see genuine change after decades of war and avoid the BARMM's fate of becoming a failed experiment like the ARMM. However, some critics suggested that the MILF's request for extension may be attributed to self-interests and may undermine the democratic development in Bangsamoro. As for other communities that express frustration and discontent, this is expected because they have experienced this prolonged and slow-moving peace process by different presidents. In addition, these communities may be reluctant and afraid that the democracy in Bangsamoro region may not proceed. This controversy clearly stems from the complexity of Bangsamoro's ethnic and political dimensions. The existing diverse communities in Bangsamoro are mainly bind by Islamic religion. However, clans and loyalties to the different factions or groups can break the bind between the different communities. The former rebel MILF is very influential in Maguindanao and Maranao communities, but less in the Sulu archipelago, which mainly supports MNLF. Other communities are clan-dominated. In fact, other militant groups have already attempted in discrediting the credentials of the ex-rebels who are running the interim Bangsamoro government. This very diverse environment really requires a great effort to unite everyone and to rebalance all the aspects, including ethnic identity, language, and political power; else the peace process will not succeed.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the first requirement for reconciliation involves equalization, humanization, and personalizing of the adversary (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). In addition, reconciliation also requires seeing the conflict as solvable, and acknowledging that all ethnic groups or communities have genuine grievances, objectives, and needs that must be met by the Bangsamoro government. Reconciliation is also a re-establishment of friendship among communities that split due to traditional, ethnical and political differences. This development of friendship, which includes understanding other communities' need would result in trust-building. With all these enumerated definitions for reconciliation, it is very clear that the Bangsamoro government at this early stage of governance has to work on group-to-group activities, allow the people to practice their right of speech, listen to their needs, create

activities for development, re-examine the ethnical and political identities to understand them, and balance the distribution of power and wealth.

Abuza and Lischin (2020) states that “Peace processes do not end at the signing of the agreement; they require years of continued implementation, legal tweaking, the delivery of services and transitional justice, and the management of expectations.” This simply implies that the solution to a very complicated problem is not solvable by simple reconciliation process by signing agreements, instead, it requires time and consistent work from both the Bangsamoro government and the Philippine government. In addition, the Bangsamoro government has to listen and address the needs of its constituent ethnic and tribal groups to avoid violent inter-communal conflicts. At the moment, the former MILF rebels are undergoing re-negotiation of identity within Bangsamoro, which is a very difficult, delicate and complex step to do (as in Section 3.2.6). In addition, the Bangsamoro region is under internal societal reconciliation as well (as in Section 3.2.5), particularly with those who opposed the extension for political transition and who expressed discontent. There is a significant opposition from other communities, whether clan-dominated or not. This opposition implies that the superordinate social identity as Bangsamoro is not fully working or dominating at the present. Clearly, the Bangsamoro government and the former MILF rebels are in the process of building trust and legitimacy. If this delicate situation is not addressed properly and promptly, the current peace process may freeze. Thus, the interim Bangsamoro government has to double its effort in convincing and showing to all Bangsamoro communities that they can be trusted and that their intentions are for the common good and not for their self-interests.

Since peace process is time-dependent, the longer the transition period the interim government has, the more chaotic it may become because of potential creation of *negative identity*. On the positive side, the extended time that the Bangsamoro government has may add certainties and stability on the political status and the autonomous region itself, and provide opportunities to address urgent challenges in the peace process such as addressing the inter-communal and clan-related violence (Engelbrecht, 2021).

As a summary, Figure 12 illustrates the role of the Bangsamoro identity in the Mindanao conflict, as social and collective identity dictated by religion and ethnicity. Religion fosters

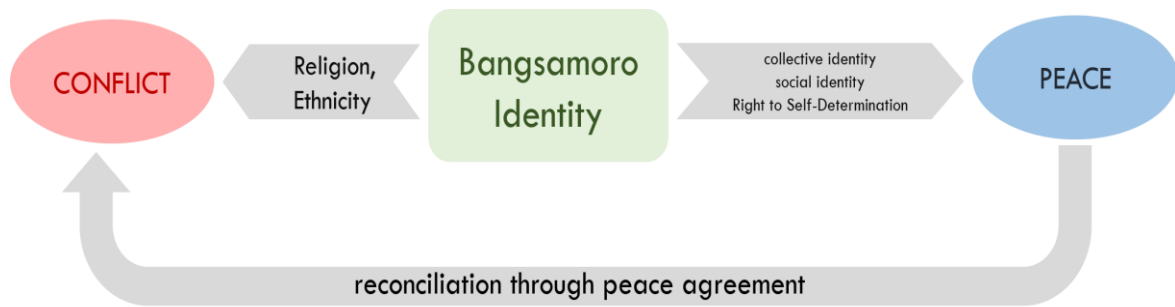


Figure 12. A simple schematic diagram for the Mindanao conflict that is driven by the Bangsamoro Identity, which has to be addressed by solving this identity issue through Right to Self-Determination (RSD) approach. The Bangsamoro Identity as a driver for the conflict is mainly based on religion and ethnicity, which both dictates the collective and social identities.

nationalism during the course of the contemporary Mindanao conflict, which unites all the Bangsamoro people for a single cause of self-determination through religion and territory. Thus, religion can be attributed to the social identity of Bangsamoro people. This makes the Bangsamoro identity as superordinate social identity (Figure 11). In contrast, ethnicity plays an important role in territorial and political aspects in BARMM. In particular, ethnicity plays a vital role as a collective identity (Figure 11), but can also be a social identity, in the current peace agreement and interim Bangsamoro government. The interplay between social and collective identity based on ethnicity can either freeze or advance the peace process. The BARMM is a diverse community with 13 different ethno-linguistic groups. If power for governance and territory are not distributed evenly or fairly among these ethnic groups, political and territorial issues that can cause inter-communal and clan-related violence would arise. These internal conflicts can challenge the peace process. In addition, it is important to note that implicitly, Tausugs represent MNLF while Maguindanaoans represent MILF. Thus, the current clash between MNLF and MILF may result to a clash between Tausugs and Maguindanaoans if this conflict would not be resolved. The BOL is mainly governed by the Right to Self-Determination. However, this concept is complex. So, addressing the Bangsamoro identity as a superordinate social identity would not solve fully the Mindanao conflict. Ethnicity has to be considered as well in the concept for Right to Self-Determination to sustain peace in Mindanao.

6 Conclusions

The contemporary Mindanao conflict (after the American colonial era) between the militant groups (i.e., MNLF and MILF) and the Philippine government is a struggle for independence from the tentacles of the Philippine government. However, independence is difficult to achieve during the course of Mindanao conflict, which forces the MNLF and MILF to negotiate for autonomy instead. By employing mixed methods research, which entails combining both descriptive (quantitative) statistics and qualitative research data from secondary sources, this thesis shows that the Mindanao conflict is mainly attributed to identity issue, particularly the self-determination of Moro people or Bangsamoro that consequently provides them the right to reclaim their own territories. Thus, the Mindanao conflict is mainly driven by the unified and shared Bangsamoro identity, which can be considered as superordinate social identity. Based on the concept of Social Identity Theory (SIT), the Bangsamoro identity is strongly driven by religion and ethnicity, which both formulate social and collective identities, and the right to self-determination (Figure 12 and details in Section 6.1). Understanding and addressing these factors that formulate Bangsamoro identity would aid in sustaining peace in Mindanao (details in Section 6.2). In particular, religion creates the perception of nationalism, and the ethnicity creates territorial and political conflicts within the Bangsamoro community. Thereby, the unification of Bangsamoro people based on religion is important during the struggle for autonomy, while ethnicity plays a vital role for the current peace process. By assessing the ongoing peace agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines (GPH), called the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), this study attempts to foresee if the BOL can facilitate sustainable peace and stability in the BARMM region. As of now, it is likely that there is still a long way to go for reconciliation and peace to happen in the Mindanao, although, the BARMM region as well as its self-governance is a work in progress. In fact, some clans and other militant factions (e.g., MNLF) already show dissatisfaction and opposition towards the current (interim) Bangsamoro government. This clearly suggests that BARMM has to undergo re-negotiation of identity, reconciliation within the Bangsamoro community, and trust-building for the peace-building process to advance.

6.1 Religion and ethnicity influence Bangsamoro identity as a collective and social identity

For the Moros, Christians, and Lumads, identity plays a significant role in shaping their self-concept and ideologies. Identity guides them in defining their direction, purpose, and sense of belonging, as well as their values and beliefs. As for the Mindanao conflict between the militant groups and the Philippine government, the in-depth analysis conducted in this study using mixed methods research reveals that the Bangsamoro identity struggle holds a crucial role in the Mindanao conflict, which is significantly influenced by both collective and social identities, dictated by religion and ethnicity. In general, the term *Bangsamoro* is the identifier for the Muslim Filipinos residing in Mindanao. *Bangsa* means nation that associates with the collective identity based on territory and ethnicity; while *Moro* is a social identity based on religion that mostly include Muslims. Social groups can be formed when individuals share similar traits and beliefs including religious practices or cultural and historical heritage, which are all evident in the Bangsamoro community. In addition, the Bangsamoro people have a deep connection to their identity and their way of life, which is expressed through their religion and ethnicity. As a result, shared religious and ethnic backgrounds provide a sense of belonging and community for those who share these commonalities. Although these defining characteristics serve as important markers that reflect the unique cultural heritage of each ethnic groups within the Bangsamoro community, the different ethnic groups managed to stand for a single cause, that is to have an independent or autonomous state. It is important to remember that their different ethnic backgrounds with different practices may result to disunity as well when circumstances arise.

In the Mindanao conflict, religious identity is mainly used by the largest militant groups, the MNLF and MILF, to weaponize their war against the Philippine government. This resistance was influenced and rooted to the foreign colonialism by Spain and America. Since in the American era, Muslims and Christians were already separated because of unfair distribution of territories and power. After the American independence, the Philippine government that is represented by Christians, started to rule the whole Philippines including Mindanao. Thus, the revolutionaries were inspired to participate in armed resistance as minorities with Islamic religious beliefs, which is different from the Christian majority that represents the state. Religion was necessary for Moros because it gave them legitimacy to fight for their rights and

freedom. Additionally, religion was a potent tool in legitimizing the armed resistance as a self-defense mechanism against unfair treatment towards the Moros. Both the MNLF and MILF identified themselves as "Us", the Bangsamoro or Moro or Muslims; while the government was considered as "Them", the Christians. Thus, the religious identity has separated the Filipinos, which shaped the perception of nationalism, which ultimately motivated and fueled the Mindanao conflict. Apart from the prior conflict between Christians and Muslims, the Philippine government's actions have undeniably caused the Moros to feel threatened that their identity as Muslims is taken away from them. It is expected that the feeling of frustration and anger can arise when someone's identity is at risk, which can lead to negative outcomes as evident in the contemporary Mindanao conflict. Thus, acknowledging and honoring each other's identity is essential in Bangsamoro community and in the entire Philippines to promote positive relationships and prevent harmful consequences.

Belonging of the Bangsamoro people in the BARMM region necessitates the use of Muslim identity as a unifying force among the Bangsamoro people, which fosters a sense of community and shared identity. Nevertheless, the same marker may also generate a rift between the Bangsamoro people because Bangsamoro identity includes "natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands, whether of mixed or of full blood" as stated in Article II Section 1, which implies diversity and different ethnic groups may not adhere to the same beliefs. In particular, the Lumad community has a valuable cultural heritage that is deeply ingrained in their ancestral traditions. As minorities in Mindanao, they are usually subject to aftermaths of the Mindanao conflict, including clan feuds and *rido*. This action may lead to the perception that other communities are adversaries. Another intercommunal conflict is between the MNLF and MILF, which can result to Tausug versus Maguindanaoan.

Identity and ethnicity are intertwined because the Bangsamoro's cultural heritage molds the perceptions and views of the Bangsamoro people that impact how they identify themselves. Reasonably, the Bangsamoro people have used their ethnic origin as a means of self-defense against the Philippine government in their fight for autonomy in BARMM region, particularly regarding land or territories and resources. Territory, that is linked to ethnicity, plays a very important role in the conflict. In particular, land grabbing and displacements of numerous Muslims and ethnic groups during the American colonialism amplified the tension between

Muslims and Christians. Apart from territorial problems, Moros are generally not inclined to be integrated into a predominantly Christian nation, a nation that considers Christian as a universal identity that is clearly a contrary to or distinct from other ethnic and religious identities existing in the Philippines. Thus, the Moros have consistently resisted against what they perceive as an oppressive Christian colonialism, and tried to preserve their unique Filipino identity. It is very important that the Philippine government must strive to create a society that embraces diversity and religious tolerance. Promoting a sense of belonging and unity can be a way for the government to encourage social harmony and progress. However, it is important to note that this should never be used to validate or justify any form of violence or war.

6.2 Resolving the Bangsamoro identity-related Mindanao conflict through the Right to Self-Determination

The Moros have been active in armed resistance for approximately 400 years against colonialism and national governance. Thus, it is not surprising that Moros, who were free to practice their religion and rights, are fighting against the Philippine government for their right to self-determination and autonomy for more than 50 years (1971 to present). The BOL, which aims to provide the unified identity as Bangsamoro to every eligible individual as the primary objective, has adopted the approach of right to self-determination (RSD). The complex and multifaceted Mindanao conflict is attempted to address by utilizing the legal structure provided by the International Human Rights Declaration and Covenants, which uphold the principle of RSD. Ultimately, the RSD approach seeks to foster a shared identity and common purpose among all groups, regardless of their religious or ethnic differences. Moreover, the RSD approach means they should be free to (i) determine their political status, (ii) develop their economic, social and cultural systems, and (iii) live freely by exercising their culture, belief, and way of life.

Based on the ongoing transition period for self-governance in BARMM, this study has arrived at certain conclusions and assessment for the sustainability of BOL.

- Efforts to reduce conflict between Muslims and Christians may not fully solve the complex and deeply rooted issues. But the current self-governance could help ease the tension.

- At the current power distribution of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, the Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim (an MILF member) gives most of the position to the MILF and less to the rival group MNLF. It is also worth noting that the MILF self-governance represents the 13 different ethnic tribes in the region. Clan-dominated community that is ruled by important clan can pose a problem when the political power is not well organized. Therefore, the balance of power sharing is very significant to create a balanced society.
- Some of the locals are feeling disheartened and unsure by the three-year extension, which could freeze the current peace process and lead to a conflict. In particular, the ex-rebel members may head back to the mountains creating a campaign if there is no proper resolution, particularly during the normalization phase.
- The significant opposition from other communities, whether clan-dominated or not, implies that the superordinate Bangsamoro identity is not fully dominating at the present transition period. Thus, the Bangsamoro government and the former MILF rebels are in the process of building trust and legitimacy within the Bangsamoro community.

Given that the Bangsamoro are a heterogeneous ethnic group, implementing self-determination is a complex process. Self-determination may only have a limited effect on other underlying issues of the Mindanao conflict that could prolong the peace path. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that this approach may not be sufficient to meet the needs of all ethnic groups in BARMM. In order for the BOL to fully function and attain its objectives, and consequently to achieve self-determination, all ethnic groups must work together toward a common goal, combining their resources and skills to create a better future for themselves and future generations. By embracing this concept, the ethnic groups in BARMM can pave the way for a more prosperous and fulfilling future. In order for the peace process to sustain, it is vital to put an end to violence caused by *rido* or clan feuds, stop shadow economy, attend to the needs of all ethnic groups, equality (i.e., in power) should be of great importance, and negotiate with other factions to solve inter-communal conflicts. Furthermore, creating and establishing peace requires a significant amount of time and effort, as well as a genuine commitment in attaining the peace.

7 Recommendations

Further research may be required to comprehend fully the complexity of the Mindanao conflict. If given the chance, the Philippine government should provide funding for this further investigation and also for other studies related to this issue. With more financial resources, researchers can gather more extensive and valuable data that will help shed light on this complicated situation. This may unlock the door to a peaceful and prosperous future for all communities affected by the protracted conflict.

It is crucial to conduct further research on the Bangsamoro identity, including but not limited to the impact of religion and ethnicity to the contemporary Mindanao conflict. As concluded in this study, religion plays a role during the struggle for autonomy. In contrast, ethnicity is very important for the sustainability of the current peace agreement. Thus, understanding more the ethnicity, including clans, and their influence on territorial and political power may help in advancing the peace process. A quantitative and qualitative research may be conducted in BARMM, particularly at its current situation to see the full picture. This would aid the Philippine state and the Bangsamoro government in finding practical solutions for the current inter-communal conflict and promote lasting peace.

Based on the frequency of identity-related conflicts in Mindanao over the past decade, it can be assumed that such conflict will continue to happen when Christian settlers are more privileged (in terms of land) than the Bangsamoro people. However, this type of conflict is not only limited to Muslims versus Christians, but also to other tribes or ethnic groups. Thus, additional research is needed, especially about Lumads as minorities within the Bangsamoro. Lumads showed their full support for the BOL, but are usually taken for granted by the militant groups. If this inequality continues, conflict may arise. In addition, further study about the relationship among the three main ethnic groups, Maguinadanaoans, Maranaoans and Tausugs is essential to understand how they may create an internal conflict.

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