INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FOR PEACE: FOCUS ON MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN MINDANAO

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relevance of interfaith dialogue in the context of the Southern Philippines known as Mindanao. First, the discussion begins with the background that accounts for the historical injustice suffered by the natives due to the government policy giving the lands to the settlers. Second, the discussion shifts to the theories of conflict and peace offered by Rene Girard's mimetic desire, Johan Galtung's ABC triangle, Edward Azar's protracted social conflict (PSC) and John Paul Lederach's Peacebuilding. From these discussions, we have interwoven them with religious peacebuilding in seeking for a lasting peace among the people.

Keywords: Conflict; Historical Injustice; Interfaith Dialogue; Mindanao; Peacebuilding; Rebellion

> *Despite the prevailing intellectual view, religion, of course, continued to play large role in the lives of individuals and societies.[1] The forces of identity can fuel commerce or chaos, creativity or destruction anywhere in the world.[2]*

People have longed for peace, but peace has been elusive. This fact is the experience of people in the Southern part of the Philippines

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[1]Patrick B. Inman and James L. Peacok, "Conclusion: Ethnic and Sectarian as Ideal Type," in *Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton and Patrick B. Inman, ed., New York: Bergman Books, 2007, 230.

[2]Edward Luttwak, "The Missing Dimensions," in *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson, ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 9.

known as Mindanao. There has been a long history of conflict and war in Mindanao engaged by the government forces and the Muslim rebels and the whole people—Muslims, Indigenous peoples and Christians—have suffered in the devastation wrought by that violence such as the destruction of their properties, the loss of lives of their loved ones, the dislocation of people that collectively brought debilitating poverty to people. The occupation of the land that provides identity and welfare to the people is the central problem of this unending violence. To have peace, we have to work for justice. In the Mindanao context, justice means the correction of historical injustice involving the land.

Land of Promise

Mindanao has been dubbed by Philippine history books as the land of promise. It was the Manila Empire that concocted the label and it was the settlers who received the promise. Like the biblical land of promise (land of Canaan promised to the Jews in the Old Testament), Mindanao is affluent in natural resources. The water in that land fertilizes the soil for agricultural activities such as farming and fishing. Similarly, the people from Luzon and Visayas were promised abundant lands in Mindanao by the government not only for their homeland but for their livelihood as well. The people were encouraged to move to Mindanao to seize that opportunity and eventually settle in that land. Although that land is an ancestral domain of the Muslims and *Lumads*, the government apportioned it to the settlers by invoking the Spanish regalian doctrine that the state owns the whole territory. Without prior consultation with the affected ordinary people, the government apportioned the lands for people who wanted to move to Mindanao. The land was promised and the policy was implemented without the consent of the inhabitants. Promise seems to be a positive word for it is packed with a hope. When that promise was implemented, it was a realization or satisfaction for those people looking for fortunes. But it is also an ambivalent word because it can either be fulfilled or frustrated. Thus, it became a fulfilment for migrants and settlers. But, in the long run, it became a nightmare to the inhabitants and natives. This ambivalence is metamorphosed into a violence and the promise was broken by conflicting groups interested with the land. Let us be clear: Mindanao is promised by the government to the people from Luzon and Visayas and not to the original inhabitants—Moros (Muslims).[3]

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[3] Aside from the Muslims or Moros in Mindanao, we also have the *Lumads* (indigenous people) who inhabit that island. According to a legend called

Thus, the government provided "milk and honey" for the settlers but "bitter pills" for the natives. The inhabitants of Mindanao are called Mindanaoans.[4]

Reasons for Rebellion[5]

The issue in Mindanao has become complex. It is not just about the settlers that occupied their land. Although the settlers are the most visible and immediate culprits. However, it is the government that crafted the migration policy and authorized the settlement of the people on those lands. For the natives, their land is being grabbed by the settlers and they were being deprived of their land. That deprivation is translated and headed to conflict and violence. Historically, Mindanao was already occupied by Moros and governed by Sultanate prior to the arrival and conquest of Spain in the Visayas and Luzon. Eventually, during the American Empire, the island of Mindanao was annexed by the government as part of the Philippine territory without their explicit consent. Having been bypassed, Mindanao was then colonized by the Philippine government. The migration of people in Mindanao created an unequal relationship between the natives and the settlers. The Moro people felt marginalized or excluded. From being the masters of Mindanao, the Muslims are now reduced to a minority status largely concentrated in the southwestern section of Mindanao. The relationship has been inverted: the settlers became the masters while

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Tabunaway (Moro) and Mamalo (Lumad), the Muslims and Lumads were once a united people but soon separated due to their religious affiliation. Tabunaway was converted to Islam while Mamalo retained its primitive religion. Lumad is a Visayan term which means native or indigenous but it was adopted by these ethnic groups. See IPDEV, *The Indigenous Peoples of the Mainland ARMM*, Makati City: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines, 2014.

[4]Throughout my discussions, I will use interchangeably Muslim and Moro as the original inhabitants of Mindanao. Although I am aware that aside from the Muslims/Moros, there are also indigenous peoples known as Lumads in Mindanao who are also struggling for land and equality. Moreover, I shall use the words settlers or immigrants to refer to those people in Luzon and Visayas who migrated and settled in Mindanao. Although, most of these settlers or immigrants are Christians due to the majority number of Christians/Catholics in the country, I will try to avoid using it. The words settlers or immigrants are more neutral labels or words than Christians. The word Christian is a religious word or label.

[5]In this section, see: Peter Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979. Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, Quezon City: UP Asian Center, 1973. Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1998. Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000.

the natives became the second class people. The settlers took advantage of their privileged position in land acquisition and entitlement, pushing the Muslims to a marginal position in their own territory. For the Moros, these settlers were land grabbers. Moreover, the settlers brought with them their religious culture and practiced it. Since the people of Luzon and Visayas were generally Christianized/Hispanized by Spanish empire, they 'baptized' Mindanao into a Christian territory undermining the Islamic religion of the natives. In a way, the religious sensibilities of the Muslims were offended and disrespected by Christians in their display of their religion. Moreover, the government imposed a western style of government of republicanism through election of representatives disregarding and upsetting the existing Sultanate government of the Muslims led by *datus* and *sultans*. Thus, this colonization altered or perverted the culture and politics in Mindanao.

The Moro discontent articulates some deep-seated grievances of the Muslims that burst into rebellion. Although the land is the contested zone or site, it is, in fact, a struggle of the Moro identity that they want to assert and affirm, not just to be accommodated or assimilated within Christian or Western hegemony. The Moros are reclaiming their identity symbolized or represented by their land. The land ascribes identity and binds them as a people. Their identity is inseparably linked or intimately connected with their land. The land is their historical and ancestral home. The colonization of their territory and the migration of the settlers dented that identity. Identity involves a nexus between the land and the Moros. That nexus was broken or interrupted by the settlement or occupation of the migrants to their land. This intrusion of the settlers or migrants created a division or clash between the natives who owned the land and the settlers who grabbed their land. In that confrontation, the natives have to defend their identity from accommodation and assimilation. This confrontation creates a division between the in-group and the out-group. The settlers are out-group but they are the dominant group. This division categorized people based on inclusion and exclusion of groups or individuals. The once solid or common identity of the Moros is threatened by this dominant out-group.

The question of identity is no longer solidity but interaction between groups. The relationship between groups is focused on recognition and respect. In this relationship, there will be the tension of action and reaction because of the differences that exist between groups. The group is mentally categorized as either in-group or outgroup. The co-existence of these groups depends on the

recognition and respect accorded by one group to another group. This coexistence may also engender discrimination and prejudice. The land encapsulates their identity because it intertwines a complex network of culture, religion, government, economy, to name just a few. The land provided them identity of their own—a sense of belonging to their territory, ancestry, culture, religion, etc. Thus, the land is not just about a piece of lot that can be exchanged or grabbed but their social identification, religious affiliation and collective relationship with their group. In short, the land provides a sense of social cohesion.[6] Once their land was taken from them, their identity is damaged. The once peaceful people now raise their voices and arms against the invaders of their land crying out for social justice. They wanted to reclaim their own territory—the *Bangsamoro* (Moro or Muslim Nation) to restore their identity. The *Bangsamoro* is an expression of a social cohesion or solidarity that struggles for social justice and claims their collective identity. The Muslims are bonded by that communal identity represented by their land. The rebellion staged by the Muslim rebels is a war (*jihad*) waged by them against the evil government and opportunist settlers because they perceive that their identity is being threatened and maligned. Thus, the conflict revolves around Muslim identity asserting itself against the engulfing dominance of Christianized/Westernized government.

Rene Girard's Mimetic Desire

In terms of the conflict between in-group and out-group that, if unabated, would lead to open violence, we can apply Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire. This mimetic desire is specifically used in the beginning phase of the conflict between the setters and the natives of Mindanao. In mimetic desire, desire is taken to mean imitation. People imitate others. However, it is not just the other that they imitate but the desire of the other. Before the advent of the settlers, the Muslims lived practically in social harmony. Only when the immigrants settled in the Muslim territory that chaos began. The settlers intervened and disturbed the general tranquillity of the place. The co-existence of these two groups in the same territory created the social problem in the area. The settlers began to demarcate and occupy their land. That settlement of the immigrants created a division between groups. The in-group (inhabitants) and the out-

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[6] See Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, London & New York: Routledge, 1996. Michael Hogg & Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*, London & New York: Routledge, 1988. Michael Hogg, *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness: From Attraction to Social Identity*, New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

group (settlers) desire one thing or same thing—land. When the settlers were taking their land and building their houses, the Muslims awakened their interest in their land and wanted to protect their land. The ordinary land became a contested site. That common desire to own or possess the land eventually led to conflict between them. The Muslims imitated the desire of the settlers on the land. In a nutshell, Girard insight is this: desire is mimetic and, because of this, it is an acquisitive impulse which engenders rivalry and conflict in the community.[7] That imitative desire is the acquisition or possession of the land. Thus, the starting point of his theory rests on what he terms 'acquisitive mimesis' which focuses on the appropriation or possession of the land as an object of desire. As they attempt to obtain this object, they compete for it since they vie and pit for the same thing. Thus, aside from being imitative and acquisitive, desire is also conflictive because the other (immigrants) and the subject (Muslims/Moros) become rivals competing for the same object (land). Thus, they were led into a struggle for ownership and supremacy. In the process, their competitive behaviour turns conflictive because this competition eventually ensues into violent encounter. The rivals try to prevent one another from obtaining the object they both desire through hostile or cruel means.[8]
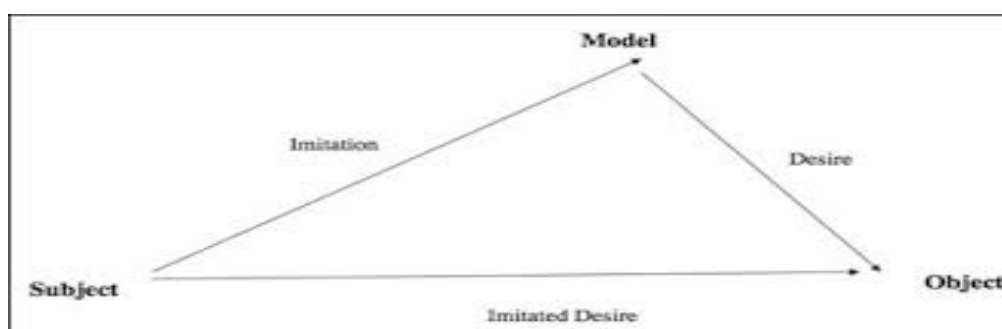
Mimetic Triangle

In this case, the subjects (inhabitants) imitated the desire of the other (settlers). The other (settlers) becomes a double for the subject (inhabitants) because it assumes both a model in having the interest on the land and a rival in the ownership of the land. Thus, they compete together for the land as object of their desire. The situation

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[7]Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, London & New York: Continuum, 2005, 160.

[8]Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, tran. Yvonne Frecerro, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, 9.

has evolved into conflict since they are no longer preoccupied on acquiring the object per se but determined in overcoming the rival. The settlers fix their desire for the object by surmounting or eliminating the inhabitants who as rivals become obstacles in the acquisition of the land and the satisfaction of desire for the land. In this rivalry, the settlers must conquer the inhabitants. In mimetic desire, envy creeps into the rivalry. Envy subordinates a desired object to the possessor of it. To put it in another way, envy is directed toward the possessor and not toward the possessed object. The settlers envied the inhabitants because they owned and possessed the land. The possessor of the object enjoys a privileged relationship with it.[9] Thus, the settlers discriminated and prejudiced the inhabitants to discredit and undermine them. In Girard's analysis, the mimetic desire is a threat to the very existence of human society because it leads to the displacement or destruction of the rivals. The relationship between the inhabitants and the settlers turns violent because they want to obtain the same land to satisfy their desire. Their competitive endeavour would ensue into violence. The desire to acquire what the other has is the root of violence.

Johan Galtung's ABC Paradigm

From the beginning of the conflict to the actual conflict, we can turn to Johan Galtung's paradigm of conflict in the case of Mindanao. Galtung provides a triangle of conflict which includes the vertices of attitude (A), behaviour (B) and context (C) (some would prefer Contradiction).[10] Attitude is basically one's perception to someone or something. In the Mindanao case, the attitude of the settlers towards the Muslims is one of prejudice that portrayed the Muslims as Other (for example, they are different in religion and in language). In a majority and minority relationship, the majority defines and degrades the minority. Hence, since the settlers have increased in number thru time, they labelled the Muslim in a negative or inferior status. In that negativity, the settlers were included while the Moros were excluded in their group belonging. Behaviour is the actualization or externalization of attitude in concrete action such as

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[9]It is in this move that desire becomes metaphysical, rather than merely social or material. Such enmity or rivalry is more likely to occur if the model turned rival is someone near and of equal status—for instance, a neighbor (what Girard terms internal mediation)—than if the model is someone distant or of obviously higher status – for instance a celebrity (external mediation).

[10]See Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and High Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, 3rd Edition, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, 10-12.

hostility and coercion which can be expressed in threats and attacks, marginalization and discrimination of the Other. For instance, the prejudice is a perception of the settlers towards the Muslims that is translated into a behaviour, that of discrimination (such as taking advantage of their privilege in grabbing and entitling lands at the expense of the Muslims). Since the settlers belonged to the privileged majority and the Muslims to the subordinated minority, they should get more chunks of lands and should have those fertile lands. Thus, the settlers got the land they wanted and settled on it, although it was already occupied by the Muslims before they arrived. Thus, the law of land tenure was skewed to the settlers at the disadvantage of the Muslims. The context is the situation where there is an incompatibility of goals generated by the conflicting interests of these groups. In the case of Mindanao, the context is the conflict of interests between settlers and Muslims in the land. Both of them were interested in the land for their homestead but the structure that governed the land tenure law was asymmetrical since it favoured the settlers more than the Muslims. Since the settlers were composed of the majority and backed up by the government, the lands were awarded to the settlers depriving the Muslims. The Muslim felt deprived and debased in their inferior state.
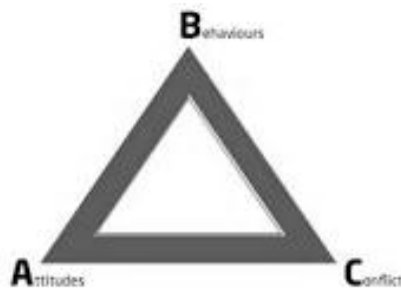
Moreover, for Galtung, there are gradations of conflict, one latent and the other manifest. The latent is hidden or controlled while the manifest is externalized and expressed. When all three components are present and operative, then there is a manifest conflict. However, when the three components are lacking or inhibited, then there is only latent conflict. Nonetheless, the latent can develop into manifest in time. The latent can explode when it is triggered or provoked by a situation that facilitates its eruption. The conflict in Mindanao has a long history. So, the conflict started from a latent one and throughout history, developed further into a manifest one. The latent became manifest when it is precipitated by some driving events that exploded into violence. Historians often cited violent events against the Muslims committed by the military forces and Christian militias that drove them to retaliate and avenge. These violent events were

the *Jabidah* massacre where young Muslims were murdered by military men, the *Ilaga* massacre where Christians murdered Muslims in a mosque and the Martial law where it militarized and terrorized Mindanao by the Marcos dictatorship. Since the three components were altogether present, then there was the full-blown violent conflict. In the case of Mindanao, the Muslims took arms and fought against the Christian settlers and government forces.

Galtung further developed a triangle of violence. The violence is represented or embodied in various forms. Following the triangle, we have the following forms: the Structural Violence, the Cultural Violence and the Direct Violence.[11]
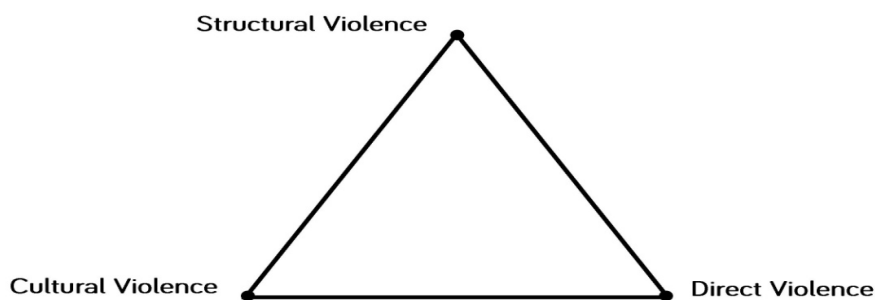
The structural violence is built on social relationship. Since it is fixed, people take the structure for granted because it becomes ordinary and natural. Such relationship can inflict violence unintended by the actors. This violence can be vertical (top down) or horizontal (among actors). In the case of Mindanao, structural violence is the unfair relationship between the Muslims and settlers in terms of land acquisition and entitlement. Although the Muslims were the original inhabitants of Mindanao, the settlers took advantage of their privileged position of power by marginalizing them. They applied for entitlement of the land and the government favoured them. The cultural violence refers to the justifications that would legitimize violent actions. This violence can be seen in terms of content (The policy of migration of people in a Muslim territory) and of its actors (The settlers against the Muslims). For example, land grabbing was justified by the settlers because they were the first to title the land. However, they were able to title the land because they got the resources to pay the charges and the connection to the officials in the bureaucracy. Direct violence is physical assault or verbal attack intentionally inflicted by an actor to another. For example, the Muslims felt aggrieved by the

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[11] Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict Development and Civilization*, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute & London: Sage Publications, 1996, 24-39.

maltreatment they received from the settlers and avenged their victimization by killing the settlers and burning their houses. Their revenge is violent.

Edward Azar's PSC Paradigm

The struggle of the Muslims against the government has been prolonged for many years. The prolongation of conflict can be explained by the theory of protracted social conflict (PSC) that Edward Azar offered. The PSC provides some reasons on the continuing conflict between groups. Basically, Azar is convinced that the basis for protracted social conflict is found not outside the state but inside it. This conflict is zeroed in on the communal identity of the group. In Mindanao, there is a disarticulation or separation between the Philippine government (state) and the Sultanate in Mindanao. In its migration policy, the government favoured the settlers and thereby deprived the Muslims of their lands. The settlers were given the priority in the land while the Muslims were at their mercy. The Muslims connected the identification of the government with the settlers. In that identification, the government and the settlers colluded to deprive them of their rightful lands. The deprivation of their needs was expressed in their demands and grievances to the government. However, these calls were ignored and so the Muslims were frustrated in their attempt to settle their grievances. They were not taken and heeded seriously. Thus, the government did not only deprive them of attention, but also frustrated their needs. The Muslims felt that the needs of the settlers were far more important than their own. They did not matter to the government. Since the Muslims cannot identify themselves with the Philippine government and with the Christian settlers, they solidified themselves into a separate people. They wanted to separate or secede from the Philippines. In this objective, the Muslims rallied and found themselves united in that single struggle for independence. Their aspiration was supplied and mediated by their social cohesion. They formed their own force—the Moro Nationalist Liberation Front (MNLF) headed by Nur Misuari and then the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) founded by Sheikh Hashim Salamat—that would defend them from the government forces. The Muslims in Mindanao found their allies in the countries outside the Philippines— the Muslims in the Arab world.[12]

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[12]Marites Danguilan Vitug and Gloria Glenda, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*, Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affiants and Institute for Popular Democracy, 1999.

In the encounter and interaction between the Muslims and the settlers, there was already an unequal power that advantaged the settlers who were supported by the Philippine government. Their advantage elevated them as superior people over and above the inferior Other—the Muslims. Their superiority was backed by their number since the settlers gradually outnumbered the Muslims. Since their lands were occupied or grabbed by the settlers, the Muslims were forced to relocate in areas inferior in quality and in fringes of the island. Since they competed on the same lands, they excluded each other. This exclusionary relationship generated reciprocal negative reactions which perpetuated communal antagonisms and intensified these social conflicts. They became aggressive enemies. Antagonism, dehumanization and subordination served to justify violent encounter. In that relationship, peace shrunk and conflict ensued. Thus, the latent conflict led eventually to manifest conflict—open violence. Thus, violence was a culmination of that conflictive relationship.[13]

Proposed *Bangsamoro* Organic Law (BOL)

To address the grievances of the Muslims, the Congress crafted a version of their *Bangasamoro* Law which tackles the historical injustice in Muslim Mindanao with regard to land problem. [14] In the *Bangsamoro* Organic Law (BOL), Section 1 of Article XI, the provision on transitional justice provides the mechanism on the reparation of unjust dispossession of land. To quote:

> The Parliament shall enact laws providing for adequate reparation to the *Bangsamoro* people affected by unjust dispossession of territorial and proprietary rights or customary land tenure, which may include payment of just compensation and relocation of such people. *No land title issued by the National Government under the Torrens System shall be invalidated* (Italics added).[15]

This provision is interesting not just because of the reparation itself but the exemption given. The reparation is not just a recognition of the historical injustice inflicted on the Muslims but also of the

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[13]Edward Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*, Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1990, 5-17.

[14] The Bangsamoro Organic Law has undergone various revisions from the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). The BOL will effectively replace the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and created a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR).

[15]Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, *Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao*, *Republic Act No. 11054*, http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/07jul/20180727-RA-11054-RRD.pdf, Accessed January 23, 2019.

compensation given as payment or relocation to the aggrieved Muslims. This compensation would hopefully settle the issues of land dispossession of the Moros. In that repayment, there is the admission for those wrongs and their rectifications. If they are paid or relocated, the Moros would be appeased by that gesture and they would live in a peaceful coexistence. However, the exemption almost rendered the provision of the reparation immaterial or inconsequential. The Torrens System is an American legacy of land registration that provides certificate of title to the owner or claimant.[16] The Torrent System is built on the Regalian Doctrine since all lands belong to the state and the state would determine the ownership or entitlement of the land. Both of them are part of the Spanish and American colonial regimes.[17]

The principle of the Torrens System is commendable since it provides security with facility in dealing with land issues.[18] "This is made possible by defining absolute status of a given property in a certificate of title with a governmental and universal guarantee."[19] However, we have to note that there is a major defect of the Torrens System as practiced in the bureaucracy. It is not just the tediousness and technicality in the application of land registration, but more importantly, the possibility of fraudulent transactions in that application. According to Florencio Ponce, "[f]rauds may creep either in the original registration proceeding or in subsequent transactions." He adds that "[n]otarial complicity, whether in good faith or not, is the greatest stumbling block of the Torrens System in the Philippines." [20] Since forgery or fraudulence are possible in the application of the law on Torrens System, then the exclusion in the provision of validation or invalidation of these titles renders the reparation questionable and dubious. The lands under Torrens System are exempted from the historical injustice and therefore they are not covered by the reparation. If the government is really serious

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[16]In legal history, the interest on Torrens system in scholarship is made in the post-WWII. In the University pf Santo Tomas, Graduate School, two researches were written. Gregorio Bilog, Jr., *A Dissertation on the Indefeasibility of Torrens Titles*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas, Graduate School, 1957, and Nicanor T. Santos, *A Study of the Torrens System in the Philippines*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1950.

[17] Samuel K. Tan, *The Muslim South and Beyond*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2010, 76.

[18]Owen J. Lynch, *Colonial Legacies in a Fragile Republic: Philippine Land Law and State Formation (With Emphasis on the Early U.S. Regime – 1898-1913)*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2011, 412.

[19] Florencio D.R. Ponce, *The Philippine Torrens System (A Textbook on Land Titles, Deeds, Liens Descent and Mortgages)*, Manila: Consolidated Publishers, Inc., 1965, 120.

[20]Ponce, *The Philippine Torrens System*, 124-126.

and true, they should include the Torrens System in the provision and not to exclude it from reparation of historical injustice. If that exclusion is made, the conflict on land will continue and even worsen because the injustice is not really addressed and rectified.

John Paul Lederach's Peacebuilding

John Paul Lederach proposes a triangle of peacebuilding in dealing with conflict and violence. There are three types of actors which correspond to three approaches to peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is an ongoing process of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing the structural issues and durable solutions to the conflicts.[21] The type of leadership used is related to the number of people affected by the conflict. The top level leadership represents handful key actors who represent institutions or organizations. The leaders in the hierarchy are involved in this level. The grassroots leadership encompasses a large number of people who represent the population at large. The local or group leaders are involved in this level. The middle-range leadership refers to the local leaders who have connections and networks in the locality. They are connected to both the top leadership and the grassroots leadership by virtue of their position of having social capital in the community.[22]
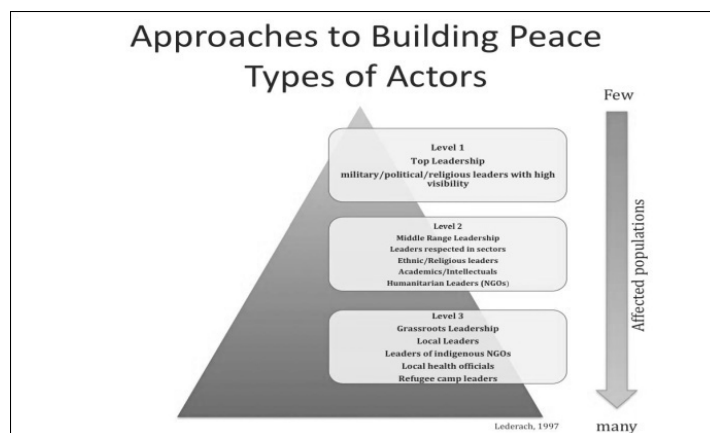
In our discussion, the top leadership refers to the Philippine government and the Muslim leadership or to the church leadership and the rebel leadership. Sometimes these leaders cannot attend or manage, so they appoint their representatives. They are engaged into a high-level negotiation and policy decision. They are experts in their own struggles and situations. In this level, the involved people are only few leaders. They have to decide on the agenda and venue, and

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[21]See Dennis J.D. Sandole, *Peacebuilding: War and Conflict in the Modern World*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

[22]John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, 37-61.

meeting place and the participants in the peace-talks. The grassroots leadership refers to local leaders who reside in the community and know their situation. They are knowledgeable of the problems of the people since they are in touch and live with them. They can become resources for designing programs for peacebuilding among the people. Since there are many people affected in this level, they need to organize small groups for facility and interaction. They are local leaders who are directly and immediately connected to the ordinary people and therefore have first-hand knowledge information of their situations and struggles.

The crucial actors belong to the middle-range leadership since these leaders mediate the top level and the grassroots level of leadership. They connect the two levels of leadership. The middle leadership can access broad information about the people that enable them to make negotiations and decisions and, at the same time, can access a comprehensive picture of the conflict and direct experience of the people on the ground. Owing to their position, these leaders are well-versed on the situations and exposed to the conflicts in their community. Thus, they have the expertise or competence in a face to face basis of interaction. Leaders in the parishes and in the *imam* (leader) of the *ummah* (community) are capable of networking in different levels and areas because they have the access to these people and the facility for communication. They can explore many areas and possibilities of peacebuilding not limited to one area but possible options and solutions for peace. This middle-range leadership can engage in various activities with the people. First, leaders can initiate problem-solving workshops because the people know their situation better than others. The middle leaders can broaden and deepen the people's knowledge of their situation through analysis of the problem. Second, they can make conflict resolution training so that the people can engage into non-violent actions in resolving conflicts. Having gained knowledge of their situation, the middle-range leadership can propose solutions to their problems not just imparting awareness of the situation, but equipping them with skills in conflict resolution. Lastly, they can create peace commissions to tackle those particular problems and resolutions so that the people can mend broken relationship.

In the case of Mindanao, the Philippine government and the Muslim leadership (MILF group) send their own representatives. In the case of the Philippine government, the Office of the Presidential Adviser of Peace Process headed by a Secretary appointed by the President of the Philippines under his direct supervision. In the peace

talks between the Philippine government and the MILF, the Philippine government appointed the chief negotiator Miriam Coronel Ferrer and the MILF leadership headed by Al-Hadj Murad Ibrahim appointed the chief negotiator Mohaghe Iqbal. In the grassroots level, there are several groups working for dialogue and peace in Mindanao and in various parts of the Philippines, especially in Metro Manila. In the church groups, we can mention the ecumenical group called Pilgrims for Peace (Pilgrims, in short) which is composed of different Christian churches, including the Catholic Church. This group operates in Metro Manila. It has sponsored consultations and talks on the prospect of peace, not just among the Muslims, but all rebel groups, including the National Democratic Fronts (NDF). The middle range leadership mediates both leaderships. The Institute for Autonomy and Governance headed by Fr Eliseo Mercado, OMI under the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City is actively engaged in peace talks in Mindanao. These efforts are geared toward working and gaining peace and justice in Mindanao. The Catholic Church adheres to the social teachings that there is no peace without justice and peace means social development of people.[23]

Religious Peacebuilding[24]

Due to the increasing number of migrants and the ensuing conflicts between groups in Mindanao, the Catholic Church was pressed to respond to the pastoral needs of the people. Many religious congregations and diocesan clergies have worked in different places and dioceses in Mindanao. These missionaries and priests are primarily trained to serve the Christians in Mindanao. However, since the Christians and Muslims live together in those areas, the missionaries and priests are impelled to engage with other religion—Islam. Having no training in that regard, the missionaries and priests are at a lost and groping in the dark. Although the Vatican II already contained document about interreligious dialogue with non-Christians (*Nostra Aetate*), they are ill-equipped to embark into that novel task. Since they are determined to take that task, some studied Islam in different universities locally and abroad. In the course of

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[23]Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2005.

[24]In this section, see William Larousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace: A Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu Journeying in Dialogue with the Muslim Community, 1965-2000*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001. Hilario M. Gomez, Jr., *The Moro Rebellion and the Search for Peace: A Study on Christian-Muslim Relations in the Philippines*, Zamboanga City: Silsilah Publications, 2000.

time, they were trained in dialogue with the Muslims. Since the Muslims and the Christians are not in good terms, they need to come to terms with this difficulty. Local attempts are made with regard to interreligious dialogues initiated by the local church and local government in different localities. Small groups are formed to start dialogues through friendly gathering and common sharing of faith and life. They did not debate or argue about doctrines or dogmas but they share their life and faith with one another. These attempts at interreligious dialogue are replicated in various groups and spread in different areas.

To do interreligious dialogue of life and faith, we can adopt John Paul Lederach's narrative model based on real life situations. This narrative model considers the element of time (Past, Present and Future) and history (Remembered History, Lived History and Recent Event) into the dialogue.[25] Time and history coalesce in the narratives of the participants where they shuffle in time and history in a dialogue. People have accumulated memories composed of significant events in their lives that they keep to themselves. These events may not be chronologically arranged but meaningfully chosen events. These memories can either be good or bad, success or failure. Thus, interreligious dialogue takes this narrative form of remembering and articulating them in dialogue. People tell stories of their own ordinary experiences in life that narrate the ebb and flow of their struggles. Participants should attentively listen to these stories and be sensitive to their gestures because voice and action communicate certain messages. For Lederach, narrative is the stuff of life that articulates the experiences of people. People share these memories in the form of stories. These stories when they are told and retold become a communal and meaningful story. Other can enter into those stories and learn from them. People can easily recall the lived story and recent event in their lives. However, the remembered history is retold by the elderly because it becomes a depository of social memory of the group or community that shapes and forms their collective identity as a people. This story must be told and retold even if they are broken by conflict and violence. These stories do not only become a communal story but a healing process in telling and retelling them. By articulating these stories, we unload ourselves and lighten our burdens. Telling stories does not only call for understanding of the situation but also does carry a therapeutic effect when spoken and heeded in the group or in public. Thus, people

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[25]John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 131-149.

need to tell and retell their stories. To reconstitute the story is to find the meaning of the past and to imagine a different future. This is a communal journey in a creative act of story-telling.

Going back to the leadership triangle, the middle leadership can engage in two different approaches in religious peacebuilding. In relation to the top leadership, the middle leadership can engage into a discursive approach using the information and knowledge gathered from the stories of the people and transformed into discursive statements. In relation to the grassroots leadership, the middle leadership can represent the grassroots leaders or the grassroots themselves. Since they are the experts or specialists in their situations, they can articulate the struggles and aspirations of the grassroots. They can propose suggestions or initiatives such as ceasefire among warring groups (Armed Forces and the Muslim rebels), infrastructure in the rural areas (projects of the economic development for the farmers and fishers) and autonomy (creation of a *Bangsamoro* in Mindanao) since the top leadership is capable of making those decisions in the negotiations (such as the congress that legislates or enacts laws). In Mindanao, the top leadership consulted the middle leadership in the peace talks and peace processes. In the end, the top leadership comes up with the creation of the *Bangsamoro* in Mindanao. Top leadership can debate on the situations on the ground for possible proposals and solutions. In relation to the grassroots leadership, the middle leadership can employ the narrative approach by encouraging the people to tell their stories based on their own experiences and situations. However, these leaders should not only listen to the people, but they too should share their stories of involvement. Here, participants do not debate or argue but understand and empathize the people in their situations. The grassroots leadership should use these stories as resources in suggesting proposals and initiatives to the middle leadership that would bring them to the top leadership. The success of peace initiatives lies not on top or middle leadership but on the grassroots leadership because the massive number of people affected belongs to the grassroots and the struggles for their needs are felt by the people on the ground.

Conclusion

The conflict between the original inhabitants (Muslims) and settlers (Christians) in Mindanao involves a complex history. This conflict can be traced from the migration policy initiated by the government where people from Luzon and Visayas settled in Mindanao. The Philippine government in Manila approved and implemented this policy. It encouraged the people of Luzon and Visayas to migrate in Mindanao. In effect, this migration and settlement deprived the Muslims of their rightful possessions of the lands. This fact is recognized by the government inflicted on the Muslims as a historical injustice. [26] Thus, the migrants cannot be totally faulted but the government that crafted the policy. However, it is the settlers who suffered the vengeance of the Muslims since they are the people who took and grabbed their lands. In our discussion, we have linked the land with identity because the Muslims derive their communal identity from their land. However, land cannot be isolated from the rest; it is intimately linked with people, with culture, with livelihood, with neighbourhood, with their ancestors that constitute the collective identity of Muslims. Land constitutes their identity. Being deprived of their lands, the Muslim, in effect, lost their identity since they were dislocated and marginalized. The Muslims were not recognized as a co-equal people deserving respect. The Muslims rebelled from these atrocities and reclaimed their lands so that they can regain their identity and restore their independence. In Mindanao, the struggle for identity is primarily in the areas of land.

The Mindanao situation shows the relevance of interreligious or interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. We have to note that interreligious dialogue for peace is a new area in peace and conflict studies that we need to explore and develop.[27] Interreligious dialogue shows that religion cannot be ignored in peace and conflict matters, nor the conflict in Mindanao can be reduced to religious factor. We cannot single out religion as an overall defining mark of identity like the "class of civilization thesis" tries to argue.[28] The issues are complex and interrelated. Religion only provides a

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[26]See The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro: Speeches from the Signing Ceremony, in *Autonomy & Peace Review*, January-March 2014. *Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro*, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), April 2, 2014.

[27]S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, "Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue*, Catherine Cornille, ed., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 149-167.

[28]Amartya Sen, *Violence and Identity: The Illusion of Destiny*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006.

framework for their struggle.[29] In the past, the modern enlightenment tries to devalue religion from public discourse and to relegate it in private sphere. However, it failed to accomplish such endeavour. Religion remains living and thriving. Perhaps, it waned in the highly industrialized countries in the west but not in other parts of the world. Religion remains a vibrant force in the everyday lives of people. The struggle of the Muslims is a search for their lost land and the assertion of their damaged identity by reclaiming their land and naming it into *Bangsamoro*.

In the practice of interreligious dialogue, religion is a web. Religion encompasses the interconnectedness of life as lived by people in their everyday existence. The religious experience of the people has a transcendental value.[30] Religion should not be reduced into doctrine articulated into propositions and argued in debates. This reductionism can further destroy and corrode relationship. We have to go back to the religious sense of the people, that is, religion as primarily lived. Moreover, we need to refocus on the merits or potentials of religion as a resource for peacebuilding. When we live religion in our everyday life, we become witnesses to the message of the Creator (whether you call it Allah or God) as love, peace and justice.[31] Religion should not set us apart because of our particular differences but rather it should relate us as different people where we listen to and learn from each other in living our religion in our everyday life. There are, of course, commonalities of the Muslims and the Christians. However, we should not overlook the divergences—particularities and differences—between them. These divergences should be respected and affirmed as long as they are life-giving and peace-enhancing in the lives of people.[32] These divergences show the religious incommensurability of each tradition and belief. They challenge us to exert more effort to be respectful to the multireligious realities in our environment and to be critical and open to our relationship. The conflict and violence in Mindanao should be resolved in a peaceful way and the Muslims should be respected in their difference. Only then can peace flourish in Mindanao.

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[29]Steve Clarke, *Justification of Religious Violence*, West Sussex: Willey Blackwell, 2014.

[30]Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, London: SMC Press, 2010.

[31]Linda Hogan, Solange Lefebre, Norbert Hinterseiner and Felix Wilfred, ed., *From World Mission to Interreligious Witness,* London: SCM Press, 2011.

[32]James B. Wiggins, *In Praise of Religious Diversity*, New York: Routledge, 1996.