

The cost of war in human dimension: the case of Lanao del Sur

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*“To be born to create, to love, to win at games
is to be born to live in time of peace. But war
teaches us to lose everything and become what
we were not. It all becomes a question of
style.”*

– A. Camus

Based on the human development framework, human security is defined not simply as freedom from *fear* but also as freedom from *want* and *humiliation*.

The conflict in Muslim Mindanao, particularly in Lanao del Sur, spans decades, even centuries, and is complex, deeply rooted and multifaceted. Its long history has brought tremendous economic losses, displacement, pain, humiliation and deep trauma to those affected. And more than the economic costs which are so high that they have affected the entire Philippines, it is the social costs that have almost systematically destroyed the lives of the people directly affected—the Moros¹

of Mindanao, especially the Maranaos of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City.

The effects are succinctly registered in every indicator measuring human development and have consistently placed the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the bottom rank among all the regions in the Philippines in terms of human development, including human security. Sadly, the region, in particular, the province of Lanao del Sur and the city of Marawi, has otherwise huge potentials for growth and development as was evident during the time prior to the armed conflict.

¹ The term “Moro” refers to the indigenous people of southern Philippines who embraced Islam prior to the coming of the Spaniards.

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This *Notes* chronicles the developments that led to the contemporary armed conflict in Mindanao (the late 1960s onwards) and the outcomes that brought about the impoverishment and further marginalization of the Muslims, in particular, the Maranaos of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, and offers recommendations on what and how initial steps may be taken to help rectify the situation and prevent its further deterioration.

Lanao del Sur prior to the Martial Law conflict

In the pre-1970s period after World War II, Lanao del Sur, in general, and Marawi City, in particular, had about 3/4 of their population as Muslims, roughly 1/3 as Christians, and the remainder a sprinkling of other religions.

Based on several accounts, the long standing antagonism that used to be evident between Muslims and Christians was virtually absent in the period after World War II (WWII) due perhaps to the fact that both stood side by side fighting a common enemy during WWII. As such, Muslims and Christians lived harmoniously together; trading and agriculture were good; and Marawi City was a meeting hub of both Muslims and Christians as well as a distribution center of Maranao goods. The city was also a place where people enjoyed quiet walks amidst flowers of various colors and big acacia trees.

Muslim and Christian families were neighbors who often exchanged food during mealtimes. Children played with and treated one another like brothers and sisters, participating in activities that celebrated holidays like Christmas, Ramadhan and Valentine's Day with no consciousness about such days as exclusive religious practices.

In short, Lanao del Sur and Marawi City during this time were places where people were generally happy and progressive.

² "Bangsamoro" refers to the Moro homeland.

Events that changed the course of things

Although the present Moro struggle has a long historical root that traces back to the days of the Spanish and American colonialists' efforts to invade and subjugate the Muslims into their fold, aided by Christian Filipino allies (the latter leading to the solidification of the Muslim-Christian antagonism in the Muslim Mindanao area), it was the series of events in the late 1960s and early 1970s that gave way to the rise of the Bangsamoro² armed struggle and to the birth of groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and later, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

These events are the following:

- *The so-called Jabidah or Corregidor massacre on March 17, 1968*

The merciless killing of at least 28 young Muslim recruits in the Philippine Army (PA) by their Christian superiors in the island of Corregidor caused much furor at the local, national and international levels. The incident outraged the Moros, especially their leaders and the increasingly intellectualized youth sector, and led to the formation of several groups aimed at protecting and advancing the Moro interests. One of the student leaders was Nur Misuari who would later form the MNLF. What infuriated the Moros more was the subsequent acquittal of all the accused military officers involved in the massacre, which, to them, was a sign of the government's low regard for Muslim lives.

- *The subsequent series of massacres of Muslims and the burning of their homes and mosques by Christian armed groups, particularly the Ilaga, and by some units of the military*

The Ilaga, the most notorious among the Christian vigilante groups, was reported to have been organized by seven local Christian politicians bent on preserving their respective power and expanding it further to areas traditionally controlled by Muslims. The group was said to have also been supported by some influential Christian capitalists and logging magnates.

Ilaga atrocities against the Muslims started in the second half of 1970 up to the middle part of 1972. It started in Muslim villages in North and South Cotabato and spread to the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Bukidnon and Zamboanga del Sur, thereby practically affecting all the Muslim areas in Mindanao.

One of the most atrocious of the Ilaga massacres was the killing of 70 Muslims and wounding of 17 others inside a mosque and nearby school in Manili, Carmen, North Cotabato. This was followed by many others, some of which were not reported, and most of which raised much indifference from the government.

Simultaneous to these Ilaga acts were the series of massacres reportedly by units of the Philippine Constabulary and the PA, which were comparable to the Ilaga actions in terms of number of persons killed and the extent of brutalities involved. These atrocities against the Muslims by the Ilaga and the military virtually turned several Muslim areas into “killing fields” and evacuation centers.

Like the Jabidah massacre, the Philippine government did nothing to give the victims’ relatives the justice they deserved. This and the unabated atrocities against Muslim communities by the Ilaga and some units of the military led to the birth and growth of various small, isolated and uncoordinated armed groups of Muslims who began to fight against the Ilaga and the government.

- *The declaration of Martial Law on September 21, 1972*

The violence that started between armed Muslim groups, on one hand, and the Ilaga and the military, on the other, as a result of the Ilaga and certain military brutalities, escalated into a large-scale war after the declaration of Martial Law. Pushing the war forward were the government’s crackdown on so-called “subversive” elements like the communists and Moro secessionists, and the confiscation of firearms in the hands of civilians, especially in the Muslim areas. Already

extremely terrified by their experience with the Ilaga and some units of the military, the Muslim civilians found it unacceptable to have their guns, which they began to keep for self-protection, surrendered to or confiscated by the military who, at that time, were also beginning to assume control of certain aspects of public governance in the Muslim region.

While several Moro leaders insisted on the use of peaceful methods such as manifestoes, position papers and protest rallies/demonstrations in articulating Muslim interests and grievances, the fact that all these fell on deaf ears on the part of the government eventually led to these leaders’ launching of armed and secessionist movements against the government.

The price paid

Nowhere has the effects of the war and the long-standing conflict in the Muslim communities been more evident than on human development. The effects had put considerable strain on the delivery of basic social services such as health, education, and social services. Centuries of neglect by the government compounded the problem and have left the Muslims behind the rest of the country in terms of various human development indicators (Table 1) and suffering from multiple disadvantages, with deep scars that are not easily healed.

In the area of health services, the ARMM’s health situation is the worst among all the regions in the Philippines. Access to medicines, medical care, availability of doctors, nurses and other health care personnel is virtually absent. In Lanao del Sur alone, many municipalities do not have a rural health unit (RHU) nor access to free immunization, nutritional supplements, maternal/prenatal care, and family planning services.

In terms of life expectancy, both men and women in the ARMM die younger than their counterparts in other areas of the country by approximately 11 and 12 years, respectively.

With regards to education, while the gap between the Muslim region and the rest of the country in terms of elementary and high school enrolment rates is not so big, it is in terms of cohorts that the wide disparity becomes glaring. For instance, recent data from the Department of Education (DepEd) indicate that only 1 out of 10 children in the ARMM who enrolled in Grade 1 got to complete high school.

With no resources and financial capacity to support school-related expenses (even with free tuition) and amidst the conflict situation, the odds against finishing elementary and high school for the Muslim youth are daunting.

Moreover, the armed conflict has forced many families to flee from their homes and evacuate. Such displacements further aggravated the difficulties for families to get their children to school. One outcome is early marriage among young Muslims. With no schooling nor skills nor prospects for employment, the Muslim youth live in poverty and transfer such poverty to the next generation.

Close-up: Lanao del Sur and Marawi City

One remarkable impact of the conflict in Lanao del Sur and Marawi City is the fact that almost everyone—Muslims and Christians—suffered. Box

1 gives chilling accounts of the fear and despair of the residents as the war escalated in the 1970s.

Besides the personal trauma felt by the province's and city's residents, the war also has its telling effects on the following:

Education

While Lanao del Sur has been fortunate to have the presence of the Mindanao State University (MSU) right in the city of Marawi, the MSU and its accompanying educational facilities, including community high schools, are not enough to cater to the educational needs of the young Maranaos. A bitter irony is that many Maranao youth could not even get into the MSU system because they could not pass its entrance, qualifying examinations. As such, the University had to devise remedial and bridging programs to be able to provide access to these youths. Sadly, the inability of the Maranaos to pass the examinations and compete with their non-Muslim peers has been largely due to their long decades of inaccessibility to educational facilities/services as brought about by the effects of war and not because of inferior IQ.

Health services

The profile of the health care situation in Lanao del Sur speaks of very poor and inadequate facilities and services. Moreover, what little there is (11 health care centers/hospitals for the whole province, government- and privately- owned), are not PhilHealth-accredited and have not reached the basic minimum requirements for standard quality care.

Commerce and industry

What used to be a thriving city in terms of commercial and industrial activities has become depleted of resources and overburdened. Marawi City, in comparison with its neighboring cities, is now considered as the worst in terms of income and expenditure per capita, poverty incidence/depth/severity, and num-

Table 1. Indicators of human development in ARMM

Indicators	ARMM	Philippines	Rank Among 16 Regions ^a
Incidence of poverty by population, 2000 (%)	62.9	34.0	16
Average household income, 2000 (PhP)	81,519	144,039	15
Life expectancy among women, 2000 (years)	59.3	71.6	15 ^b
Life expectancy among men, 2000 (years)	55.5	66.3	15 ^b
Maternal mortality, 1995 (per 100,000 live births)	320	180	15 ^b
Infant mortality in 1995 (per 1000 births)	63	49	14 ^b
Net enrolment rate in primary education, 2001 (%)	82.0	96.4	15 ^b
Net enrolment rate in secondary education, 2001 (%)	39.2	72.2	15 ^b

^a A rank of 1 indicates the most desirable outcome.

^b Shows rank among 15 regions, no available data for Region XIII.

Source: World Bank (2003). *Human Development for Peace and Prosperity in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao*

ber of commercial places like restaurants, banks, and recreational facilities.

Moreover, except for the very small-scale brass making, mat-weaving and other handicrafts, Marawi City, in particular, and Lanao del Sur, in general, do not have any manufacturing nor industrial enterprises. Both the city and province are wanting of consumer services and the residents and visitors to the place do most of their transactions in nearby cities such as Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro City.

This in effect results in the siphoning of the city's and province's income and resources to these neighboring places, becoming their major economic "lifeblood" without, however, getting anything much in return.

Table 2 provides a comparative picture of the situation for Marawi City vis-à-vis some of its neighboring cities in terms of commercial presence and activity.

Governance

Compounding all the negative impacts of the conflict on the province and the city has been the sorry state of local governance which has affected local government management, service delivery, resource generation and management, and participatory governance.

The tragedy of the Lanao del Sur diaspora

One of the saddest things about the Lanao del Sur and Marawi City story is on the spillovers of the conflict. The immediate reaction of the affected residents had been to move out and escape from the tragedy of war. Through the years, the movement has been such that the Lanao del Sur's forced migration or diaspora has reached the northern tip of the country down to its southernmost point (Map 1). And because the displaced people, especially the Muslims, carried with them their emotional and psychological trauma, it is no wonder that their integration within the places

where they had moved has not been easy, on either their part or their host communities.

This is evident in the following issues that have hounded them as they try to carve out new lives: (a) difficulty in relating with the mode of governance in the local government unit where they stay since they have been used to the sultanate form of leadership; (b) weakening of social cohesion especially in cases where the women who

Box 1. The sounds of sorrow

Accounts of Christians about the Martial Law conflict in Lanao del Sur:

- ❖ "There were horrendous stories of fighting and killings. Many people already evacuated. Then our Maranao friends told us we had to leave for our own safety. They could not give us any assurance. Things were not normal anymore."
- ❖ "It seems all those years of being so close together suddenly turned to mistrust and hatred. It was explained to us that it was no longer safe to stay."
- ❖ "...The whole family has also experienced living in Jolo and the Tausugs are as good as the Maranaos. It was the government side from which we have bitter experience especially when our fishing boat was bombarded with gunshots because it was mistakenly identified as a boat with rebel passengers."
- ❖ "The conflict in the 1970s was very hard and depressing. Too much militarization and the military created fear among many civilians. The military conducted raids of civilian houses and confiscated all the properties they liked. There were [also] many disappearances of men and women."

Accounts of Muslim victims:

- ❖ From a 10-year old evacuee: "The war wrecked our home. My father abandoned us in the evacuation center. My mother worked in the market as tobacco vendor. My eldest brother was forced to work hard labor and then as street vendor in Manila."
- ❖ From a 70-year old widow: "We lost our properties like our houses, farm animals, and harvest from our farm field. We lost some family members who were not given proper burial due to the displacement."
- ❖ "The conflict forced our young children to work as domestic helpers abroad to earn for the family."
- ❖ "We got separated from our siblings, lost our childhood life, peace of mind, peaceful life, economic stability, cultural attachment, psychological stability, happy family, and education."

Table 2. Comparison in terms of commercial presence/activity between Marawi City and some neighboring cities (NSO, 2000)

	2002 % of Workers to Industry	2002 % of Workers in Services	2000 # of Wholesale and Retail Stores	2000 # of Manufacturing Enterprises	2000 # of Restaurants	2000 # of Hotels and Dormitories	2000 # of Recreational Facilities	2000 # of Banks and Pawnshops
City	APIS	APIS	CPH	CPH	CPH	CPH	CPH	CPH
Marawi City	6.1	72.3	345	80	137	68	8	9
Zamboanga City	15.9	72.3	614	224	226	52	66	65
Cagayan de Oro City	15.1	80.8	683	271	438	206	159	169
Tagum	17.7	61.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Davao City	21.4	62.7	1499	740	797	333	346	252
Gen. Santos City	21.7	59.9	225	141	137	75	73	57
Iligan City	19.8	64.7	320	100	137	53	38	41
Cotabato City	10.1	77.1	265	114	157	51	74	35
Butuan City	20.0	53.7	778	316	263	102	104	81
Philippines	16.3	45.9	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: A more appropriate comparison would have been to compare Marawi and other cities before and after the conflict started. Data prior to the conflict, however, are unavailable.

Map 1. The Lanao del Sur diaspora in the country



often looked down or blamed for whatever crimes and illegal activities that take place in their host communities and where they are discriminated in terms of getting choice spaces in the market place, access to credit, and gaining employment in offices and firms; (e) deprivation of sustainable source of economic and food security wherein the loss of the Muslims' land broke their existential ties to their symbol of economic and food security; and (f) vulnerabilities of the women, children, and the elderly to violence and exploitation.

A call to heed

The conflict situation in Muslim Mindanao, in particular, Lanao del Sur, is complex and is an interplay of various interrelated factors. Over the years, the costs and threat of said conflict to the

were widowed had to take the lead of the households and were forced to break tradition and adopt an alien lifestyle to earn a living; (c) affront to human dignity where poverty had led them to live in cramped rooms and resort to take on demeaning tasks to survive; (d) discrimination and exploitation where the displaced Muslims are

country's overall human security have been monumental.

In view of this, there is a need for the government and the entire Filipino people to start a paradigm shift in their thinking about the Muslim Mindanao situation. Various sectors like the mili-

tary, armed groups, local government units, business, media, and civil society should reflect and strategize on how best they can help in addressing the problem, with special focus on the following key issues:

The Bangsamoro's quest for self-determination

Such quest is closely interlinked with the Moros' desire to survive as a people with their own culture and religion. History reveals that their integration into the Philippine body politic was due to force and not through genuine desire. Their years of struggle against the Philippine government are a natural result of this coercion that has, to their mind, trampled on their human rights and identity.

This is a reality that the government and the majority of Christian Filipinos should understand and accept. To deny this would result to a never-ending conflict.

Unresolved centuries-old "wounds" among Muslims, Christians and indigenous peoples

The existence of deep-seated biases, prejudices and hatred among these tri-people, as a result of the Spanish colonization that has greatly divided the nation and has endured up to this time, is another reality that the entire Filipino people should accept.

Extreme poverty

The state of human development as reported by donor agencies is so appalling that many of the Muslim victims are reduced to living like animals that scavenge for food and share shelter with goats and cattle. It is therefore a big challenge to correct the situation wherein these people are to be given the resources to use to live decently vis-à-vis others who have so much.

Development aggression by government and multinational corporations (MNCs), on one hand, and the lack of capital investment, on the other

Greatly contributing to the state of extreme pov-

erty in Muslim Mindanao is the presence of companies, especially MNCs, that have ownership of choice land and the license to extract natural resources from the land, water, and mountains, leaving nothing to the indigenous people. For a people who equate land and its resources as their life, said situation has meant a virtual death for them.

The irony of the situation is that beyond the above picture, there is a lack of interest for investors to invest in the region precisely because of the conflict and its security risk.

Insensitive and ineffective government policies

Most government policies in the Muslim area are perceived to be culturally insensitive and ineffective in responding to the needs of the people inasmuch as they are largely based on the form of government that is inherently alien to the Muslims.

Recommendations: the alternative approaches

Based on the above, the following are hereby being proposed as alternative approaches, with strategic key action points, in dealing with the Muslim Mindanao problem.

Peace process

- Government must stop the military position and pursue the institutional position wherein it focuses on the rehabilitation of affected communities.
- A national peace policy should be enacted by Congress that addresses not only peace and development issues in the affected areas of Mindanao but also the diaspora and healing/reconciliation of the entire Filipino people.
- The MILF should be open to more dialogue and sincerely pursue other options to peace. Both the MILF and the government should be open to the participation of civil society and the local communities in the peace process.

- Women should specifically work for their active participation at all levels in the peace process.

Rehabilitation of affected families and communities

- For meaningful healing and reconciliation to occur, the displaced families and individuals affected by the war/conflict should be provided genuine support in order for them to attain justice, freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation.

- A synergy of interventions from donor agencies, the national government and the local government units, civil society and NGOs has to be developed and coordinated.

Equitable allocation and distribution of resources

- Institutionalized measures that address the widening gap between the rich and the poor, including just policies on ancestral domain, must be set up.

Natural resource management and livelihood

- There is a need to put the brakes on the aggressive involvement of MNCs in the exploitation of natural resources where the local people are left in a disadvantageous situation.
- The Mindanao people should be provided financial, technical and political support for them

to be able to harness the rich natural resources in their area for the improvement of their lives.

Addressing the vulnerabilities of women, children, the elderly, and the disabled

Corporate responsibility of the business/private sector

- Since the government cannot do it alone, the business/private sector can give their meaningful share to contribute to the development of the area.

Role of media

- Media should stop sensationalism whenever Muslims are involved, especially in labeling Muslims as terrorists, and should downplay stories and coverages regarding stereotypes and differences to foster the spirit of cultural pluralism.

Revival and pursuit of the EAGA

- EAGA elicited a lot of excitement and changed mindsets about the Mindanao region. It also strengthened cultural bonding among Muslims, on the one hand, and between Muslims and Christians, on the other hand, rekindling beautiful memories of the past. At the same time, it promoted the sharing of common legacies between the Muslims in the South and people from neighboring Muslim countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. Because of this, the active pursuit of the EAGA can contribute in the shaping of the peace process and the strengthening of regional collaboration in the fight against terrorism. ☐

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