

Managing the Muslim Problem for Philippines 2000: Issues and Prospects

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The Muslim problem has faced the Manila government since the Spanish colonization of the islands. Many attempts have been made to settle conflicts between the national government and the Muslims, but many intended solutions do not fully meet their desired ends. The writer presents some options in accordance with the Philippines 2000 program. Through these proposals, it is hoped that Filipinos, both Christian and Muslims, can participate equally in the political process and benefit mutually from the socio-economic progress attained.

Introduction

As far as we can remember, the Muslim problem has been a pain in the neck of the Manila government. At some points, its symptoms suggested a cancerous disease with surgery as its only logical solution.

With the ascendancy of Fidel V. Ramos to the Presidency of the Republic, the Muslim problem again comes to the fore as the new government starts its negotiations with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the vanguard of Muslim revolutionary forces fighting the government. For if there is one thing clear about these negotiations, it is the implicit suggestion that the previous attempts to arrest this problem have been all but successful. While its violent aspects would now and then subside, the essence of this problem would remain the same.

The Muslim Problem and Philippines 2000

What is this so-called Muslim problem? Also called the Moro or Mindanao secessionist problem, we take it to mean the need and clamor of Filipino Muslims for self-determination and social justice. Self-determination demands for sufficient political space where Muslims can exercise their self-expression and self-creation (Magallona 1987:1). Social justice, on the other hand, calls for a policy package where past neglect and injustices are significantly addressed.

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Perceptions differ as to the intensity or existence of the problem. Some are inclined to reduce it as an insignificant phenomenon that is better left untouched so that time will just cause its natural demise. To this group belong those people who criticized former President Corazon C. Aquino when she ventured into Jolo to meet the MNLF Chieftain, Nur Misuari, saying that the MNLF or the Muslim problem it represents would have just migrated into oblivion had her undue attention not resurrected it. The same group would prefer that the Ramos administration opt for inaction as a policy tactic.

Our contention points at a problem nurtured by neglect, misaction and inconsistency, never mind if the MNLF struggle is temporarily contained at one point or another. The Muslim problem, unless permanently solved, could again explode into a costly conflagration where all sides are losers, particularly the innocent civilians for whose name combatants allegedly fight. The memory of the early 70s must still be fresh in our minds.

The need to solve the Muslim problem becomes more significant when we consider the government's visions on Philippines 2000. It is difficult to imagine how we can achieve our goal of NICHood without Mindanao contributing to the national effort or without the South exhibiting signs of this "collective vision" (Ramos 1994:1).

Mindanao is not only an important cog in our economic wheel. The problem it holds consumes much of our national energy and deprives the country of the potential benefit this wasted energy could have contributed to our national development. Besides, the sons and daughters of Mindanao deserve something better than war and poverty.

The significance of Mindanao becomes clearer in view of the so-called East Asian Growth Triangle, an economic network being developed involving Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Philippine participation in this alliance is through Mindanao. This increasing cooperation is not only indicative of the potentials of improving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic collaboration but also highlights the strategic position of Mindanao, both in terms of its geographic location and resource endowment.

As Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia said:

We all have a great stake in this process of dialogue and negotiation that we have started. For we have no doubt that, given peace and unity at last, the Filipino nation will be a tremendous force for stability and progress in this part of the world. Success at these Formal Talks would therefore be yet another step forward to the realization of a peaceful, cohesive and progressive Southeast Asia that is increasingly capable of dealing with its own problems by itself and in its own way, thus concretely contributing to the shaping of a new regional order of peace and stability, prosperity and mutual tolerance (Alatas 1993:5-6).

Muslim Filipinos

At present, there are thirteen Muslim ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines, namely:

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|---------------------|-----------------|
| (1) Kalagan | (8) Tausug |
| (2) Sangil | (9) Sama |
| (3) Maguindanaon | (10) Badjao |
| (4) Ilanun (Iranun) | (11) Jama Mapun |
| (5) Maranao | (12) Palawanon |
| (6) Kolibugan | (13) Molbog |
| (7) Yakan | |

Of these groups, the Maranaos of Lanao, Maguindanaos of Cotabato and the Tausugs of Sulu have been the dominant ones owing to their numerical superiority.

For our purposes, we treat the Filipino Muslims as synonymous with the term Moros. Other groups though, like the Misuari group, suggest that the term includes non-Muslims as well.

Statistics about the Muslims in the Philippines remains a debatable issue. The peace and order situation in Moro areas, the mostly unresearched migration of Moros from within, and the political utility of Muslim reality to some partisan interests contribute to the harboring of this doubt. Misuari calls government figures colonial statistics while many Muslim groups think there must be at least five million Filipino Muslims at present.

According to the 1990 Census of Household Population, there are 2,769,643 million Muslims in the country. 1,802,360 of them (65 percent) live within the four provinces of Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) (Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) while 967,283 (35 percent) of them live outside ARMM. Most of this 35 percent live in the other areas covered by the Tripoli Agreement, particularly the interior of Lanao del Norte, Marawi City, Cotabato City, the coastal towns of Sultan Kudarat and Saranggani provinces, Zamboanga City, the southern municipalities of the Zamboanga provinces, Basilan, and the southern part of Palawan (Tanggol 1992:251; quoting NSO).

This paper attempts to present some important highlights in the manner Manila handled the Muslim problem. It seeks clarification of some important issues related to the attempt of the government to craft a policy package to curb this pestering problem. Finally, it also tries to analyze the prospects for final settlement under the present dispensation and makes certain recommendations on how to respond effectively so that peace and development is finally achieved.

While this paper tries to describe the approach of the government, it does so in a critical manner and from the view point of a Muslim observer. Hence, the reader must see through this limitation.

Managing the Muslim Problem: An Excursion into the Past

Spanish Conquest and the Moro Problem

When the Spaniards first arrived in these islands, Islam was beginning to spread in the Visayas and Luzon. Muslim principalities could be found in these northern islands including Manila, although their degree of Islamization would remain a contentious issue. Clavel (1968:21) wrote that "when the Spaniards first came to Manila in 1570, it was a principality ruled by Muslim rajahs who were members of the ruling family of Brunei."

It can be argued that much of what we face today as the Muslim problem derives from our unfortunate colonial past. One wonders what would have happened had the Spaniards not arrived on our shores. Would the country be facing a Christian instead of a Muslim problem?

Spanish attempt to colonize and Christianize the natives of this archipelago, while relatively successful in Luzon and Visayas, proved a failure in Mindanao where the Muslims had a more stable political system. Their refusal to accept Christianity and the stubborn politico-military resistance they exhibited created what amounts to a Muslim or Moro problem to the expansionist Spaniards who wanted to consolidate their power over the whole archipelago. From the point of view of Manila, therefore, the struggle of the Muslims against the political, economic and religious ambitions of the colonizers was a major problem. Clavel once said that:

They (Spaniards) had to face the truth that they could not solve what they called the "Moro Problem," which was more or less the problem of converting the Muslims in the South and assimilating them into the mainstream of the already forming Philippine society (Clavel 1968:22).

The experience of the Spaniards with the Moors of North Africa must have spiced the former's attitude vis-a-vis the Muslims of Mindanao, what with the latter's familiar cultural manifestations. By calling these natives Moors, the Spaniards must have carried whatever psychological hangups they had from their Moorish conquerors.

The more than three centuries of Spanish rule are better known for the Moro wars, so called because of the dominance of coercive methods (i.e., wars) the colonizer used against the southern natives. An important aspect of the military expeditions against the Moros was the use of Christianized Indios that would

plant the seeds of misunderstanding and mutual prejudice between these two brown brothers.

When the Americans entered the scene in the late nineteenth century, Mindanao was handcarried by the Spaniards on a silver platter called the Treaty of Paris to the White man against the protestations of the Muslims. It was as if Spain owned Mindanao when in fact it did not fully subjugate its people and that the latter's indigenous political structures and authorities even pre-dated the imposition of Spanish authority.

But what the Spaniards failed to accomplish in three centuries, the Americans did in a few decades. With the failure of Spanish military means, the Americans banked on what is now known as a policy of attraction for the Moros. While the Spaniards did not want to educate the natives, the Americans used education as a colonial tool to subjugate the Moros. The result was our cerebral captivity.

In 1917, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes was organized to administer the areas occupied by non-Christians. This was abolished during the commonwealth period "with the creation of the Office of the Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu (Senate Committee on National Minorities 1963).

Another important aspect of American policy was the use of settlement programs for Mindanao. Although migration of Christianized Filipinos from the northern part of the archipelago started during the Spanish days, there were only a few settlement areas along the northern part of Mindanao when the American regime started. Settlement colonies were deliberately established as a tool to neutralize Moro resistance and as a vital means towards the exploitation of the "vast economic resources of Mindanao" (Muslim 1991: 3-4).

Between 1913 to 1917, for example, the Insular Government established seven agricultural colonies in Mindanao, covering a total of 15,619 hectares of land and attracting "less than 1,500 permanent settler families" (Muslim 1991:8). In this program, each family was given between 8-16 hectares, as well as cash advances to cover costs of transportation, housing, implements, animals, and others. It was a generous policy that proved to be economic failures. In 1919, a new migration policy was adopted that encouraged settlers with adequate funds to support them. Implemented by the Inter-Island Migration Division (IMD) of the Bureau of Labor, it "provided transportation to 6,080 settler families (31,400 persons), most of whom went to Mindanao" (Muslim 1991:9).

Post-Independence: Integration and Resettlement

When the United States was about to grant independence to the Filipinos, Muslim datus expressed their desire that Mindanao should not be made part of

the Philippines. This plea was not heeded and Mindanao found itself being claimed again by their co-natives, albeit they are now Christianized and westernized to a certain extent.

The dominant approach of the Manila government vis-a-vis the Muslims and other cultural communities was integration. A Commission on National Integration was created in 1957 which was tasked with "bringing about, as rapidly as possible, 'the moral, material, economic, social and political advancement of the Non-Christian Filipinos,' and of making 'real, complete and permanent (their) integration... into the body politic'" (SCNM 1963).

But while the policy of integration may be taken by some as implying cultural plurality and respect for the uniqueness of existing groups, the actual meaning given is assimilation where the dominant culture is supposed to absorb the minority culture. A dominant assumption here is that the cultural communities are inferior people whose habits are better reformed to conform to those of the more "civilized" dominant group.

Another important aspect of government policy towards Mindanao and the Muslims is the resettlement of people from Luzon and Visayas.

On 12 February 1935, the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act (Act No. 4197) was passed which "marked the beginning of a more vigorous government effort to open and colonize Mindanao." Then, in 1939, the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA) was established which organized three big settlement areas, two of which were in Mindanao: Koronadal and Allah Valleys in what used to be the undivided province of Cotabato. While these areas were inhabited by Lumads and Moros, there was little regard for their interest. As one foreign observer, Karl Pelzer, commented, "it would have been better if the area could have been (was) surveyed and sufficient land set aside for Bilaan and Moros" (Muslim 1991:12).

In 1949, the Rice and Corn Production Administration (RCPA) was established and was subsequently granted three areas for its agricultural production: one in Buluan, Cotabato; one in Maramag-Wao (Bukidnon-Lanao) area; and another in the province of Palawan (Muslim 1991:13).

When the NLSA and RCPA were abolished in 1950, the Land Settlement Development Corporation (LASADECO) was created and was responsible for opening settlement areas in Tacurong, Isulan, Bagumbayan, Buluan, Sultan sa Barongis and Ampatuan, all in the old province of Cotabato (Muslim 1991:13).

In 1951, then Secretary of Defense Ramon Magsaysay sought the establishment of the Economic Development Corporation (EDCOR) principally for the Huks of Central Luzon. EDCOR opened four resettlement areas in Mindanao,

namely: Arevalo EDCOR in Sapad, Lanao del Norte; Genio EDCOR in Alamada, North Cotabato; and Gallego and Barira EDCORs in Buldon, Maguindanao.

The National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) was established in 1954, replacing LASADECO, and most of its resettlement projects were in the "Land of Promise." The Land Authority replaced NARRA in 1963 with the passage of the Agricultural Land Reform Code and it caused the resettlement of some 2,400 people until the Department of Agrarian Reform was established in 1971 with its Bureau of Resettlement.

Certain observations are worth noting at this point. First, most of these resettlement projects were established in Mindanao, the so-called "Land of Promise" and most of the settler families came from Luzon and Visayas. Second, this policy of resettlement proceeded at the expense of the indigenous peoples of Mindanao whose legitimate claims over their ancestral lands were sacrificed, what with the imposition of the Torrens System of land ownership which was alien to the natives of Mindanao. Third, as a result of this policy, the Moros and Lumads of Mindanao were statistically marginalized. They are now minority in a place they once dominated. Of the 24 provinces comprising Mindanao (including Palawan, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi), only five are dominated by Muslims, population-wise.

While these resettlement projects were economic failures, they succeeded in marginalizing the Muslims and Lumads in Mindanao and that they provided one of the strongest pillars of the continuing trouble in the South-land conflict.

Marcos and Aquino: Autonomy as a Policy

When Ferdinand Marcos became President of the Republic, he was to preside over a costly conflagration - the war in the early seventies between the MNLF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). As we all know from hindsight, the innocent civilians, for whom both parties were supposed to be fighting, lost this war and neither the MNLF nor the AFP really won despite their claim for such.

Being the most violent manifestation of the Muslim problem, this war of the 70s invited the attention of the international community, particularly the Muslim world. Whether or not we believe in the suggestion that this war was partly the innovation of those who wanted to prolong themselves in power, it led to that piece of document called the Tripoli Agreement, signed between the MNLF and the Philippine Government, with the participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) on 23 December 1976.

Self-determination was a favorite goal then among the Muslims, something that would mediate between autonomy and secession, as MNLF expression would

manifest. Secession was of course far from the minds of the majority and the government was bent on granting autonomy to the Muslims. Or so we thought.

For the unilateral implementation of the Tripoli Agreement by the Philippine Government, two regional autonomous governments, one for Region IX and another for Region XII, were created. However, these governments were very much wanting in substance; and only roughly approximated the minimum requirements for self-determination (Presidential Decree No. 1618). The Marcos government claimed that in a referendum held on 17 April 1977, the people of Davao del Sur, South Cotabato and Palawan opted out of autonomy. It must have been a ghostly process, since "Mr. Referendum" was unrecognizable when he passed before us. It was Martial Law, of course, and in these three provinces big business had (and continue to have) a big presence.

Whatever meaning given to it, autonomy became an official tool to quell Muslim unrest. Under Marcos, it succeeded as a buffer goal that would absorb much of the secessionist heat. It also contained Muslim insurgency.

When Aquino became President, negotiations were again initiated between the MNLF and the Philippine Government. Recognizing the failure of Marcos to finally put to rest the Muslim problem, the Aquino government tried to sharpen autonomy and excise once and for all from Philippine society this pestering disease.

For the first time, regional autonomy for the Muslims and the Cordillera area was enshrined in our Constitution (1987 Philippine Constitution, Article X, Sections 15-21). Through Administrative Order No. 30, the Office of the Peace Commissioner (OPC) was created to undertake research studies and design and implement programs relevant to the complex question of peace. It provided technical support to the negotiating teams of the government (OPC: February 1991).

On 2 October 1987, the Mindanao-Consensus-Building Panel (MCBP) was organized. It became helpful in the consultative activities of the government leading to the final organization of the Mindanao Regional Consultative Commission. On 24 July 1987, as called for by the Constitution, the President ordered the setting up of the Regional Consultative Commission, whose members were sworn to office in Cotabato City on 26 March 1988.

When the RCC submitted its draft of an Organic Act for Muslim autonomy to Congress, its members were expecting an active participation in the Congressional deliberation, as the Constitution mandates. But they were mistaken, as both houses of Congress went on their task of drafting an autonomy law for Muslim Mindanao, with their drafts submitted by their respective committees on local government.

In April 1989, the Senate and the Lower House passed on third reading their respective Muslim autonomy bills. A bicameral conference was organized which agreed on a consolidated version on 8 June 1989. On 1 August 1989, Aquino signed into law Republic Act No. 6734 (Tanggol 1992). To implement this autonomy program, a plebiscite was held on 9 November 1989 to ascertain the number of provinces and cities to be included in the area of autonomy. And on 17 February 1990, the first election for regional officials of ARMM was held.

The formal inauguration of ARMM was held on 6 November 1990.

Three ARMM anniversary celebrations have passed and we are still asking why RA 6734 should not be returned to Congress for overhauling. That suggestion from a certain congressman about the imperative of abolishing ARMM may be borne of a concrete realization of ARMM's failure to achieve its purposes.

We have studied the autonomy process undergone by Aquino, the content of RA 6734, and the outcomes and performance of ARMM. The findings are a mockery of the Muslim cause and an insult against the values of public administration on which restructuring of government machineries is ideally based (Tanggol 1992). It has worsened the delivery of basic services, program planning and implementation in the ARMM areas. It has demoralized and caused a lot of insecurity on the part of the government employees in the region. The area of autonomy has been reduced from ten provinces, during the Marcos years, to four. The quality and quantity of laws being passed are pitifully low. During the period we studied, only ten inconsequential laws were passed. As of this writing, only 25 laws have been passed by the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA). I am tempted to quote part of my concluding statements in my dissertation, thus:

In short, what we have seen with regards to the autonomy process of the Aquino government from 1986 to 1991 is a slide from high hopes to high despair, from optimism to pessimism, from a giant plan to meager implementation. If it were a cycle, it was from zero to zero.

Four descending steps are discernible from our viewpoint. The first step concerns the high hopes triggered by the assumption to power of Aquino. Her unprecedented trip to Jolo, her late husband's commitment to the Muslim cause, her perception of the failures of the Marcos approach, her perceived nontraditional politics which assumes some serious concern for such values as social justice and responsiveness of government instrumentation, and even her transitory powers, were factors supporting this first high step.

The second step concerns the output of the Constitutional Commission where the high hopes of the Marcos exit from power were reduced a few notches downward. By providing the guidelines for the creation of the autonomous region for Muslim Mindanao, it has actually restricted the options for the final resolution of the Muslim problem.

The third descending step refers to the output of Congress, RA 6734. This law mangled the maximum intentions of the Constitutional

Commission by its obvious display of tokenism. Congress, as usual, has only succeeded in satiating the appetite of the "carrot-eaters" among the Muslim masses.

The fourth downward step has something to do with the outcomes and performance of the policy process or the ARMM. What token goods RA 6734 intended to deliver to the Muslims somehow get clogged in the corridors of power in the region. They tend to dissipate amidst the structural and behavioral weaknesses in the "grandiose" plan called the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

One more step hence and we are back on the floor, more dirtied and exasperated than before (Tanggol 1992)!

Issues and Prospects

Our brief review of the attitude of Manila towards the Muslim problem suggests some inconsistency. We have noted a few dominant tools used to curb the Muslim problem. War, integration, resettlement, and autonomy were used at one time or another to solve this irritant, however it was perceived. It seems that Manila does not exactly know what to do with the Southern problem. Or if it does, it decides and acts so half-heartedly. Lela Garner Noble's comments regarding the previous administration reflects this inconsistency. She said that Aquino's "term ended as it had begun, with no coherent Muslim policy" (Noble 1991).

Imagine the irony. War was used as a means for pacification. Integration was used as a policy to assimilate the Muslims. Resettlement projects were implemented to unsettle the Moros. And autonomy was conceived to deny the Moros of the same.

When Ramos was elected President, the Muslim problem received new attention from Malacañang. The Peace Commission of the Aquino government was changed to the National Unification Commission (NUC) through Executive Order No. 19 which Ramos signed on 1 September 1992. The NUC was an advisory body tasked to "formulate and recommend, after consulting with the concerned sectors of society, to the President... a viable general amnesty and peace process that will lead to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the country" (The NUC and the Peace Process November 1992). Haydee Yorac was designated as chairperson of the NUC, with the following as members: Department of Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon; Department of National Defense Secretary Renato de Villa; Senator Rodolfo Biazon; Senator Wigberto Tañada; Rep. Eduardo Ermita; Rep. Jose Yap; Bishop Fernando Capalla; and Dr. Feliciano Cariño.

A consultative body called the Council of Advisers was also created and in which three Muslims were designated as members.

On 2-4 October 1992, the first round of exploratory talks between the group and the MNLF was held in Tripoli, the Great Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Another round was held in Cipanas, West Java, Republic of Indonesia on 14-16 April 1993. After these exploratory discussions, the first formal peace talks were held in Indonesia from 25 October to 7 November 1993.

Support Committees "under the umbrella of the Mixed Committee" were created to make "detailed studies on the various items in the Tripoli Agreement" (GRP MNLF MOA 1993:3). A ceasefire was effected.

A recurring issue in the continuing effort to solve the Muslim problem concerns the role of the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF and other Muslim groups think it should be the principal basis for any discussion and solution. Being an international agreement, many believe the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has no other recourse but to honor its spirit and intent.

In the Cipanas Exploratory talks, it was prescribed by the GRP and MNLF panels that the Peace Talks shall "focus on the modalities for the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit, to include: (a) Those portions of the Agreement left for further or later discussion; and (b) Transitional implementing structure and mechanism" (MOA:3).

The greater difficulty with regards to the Agreement concerns the interpretation of its provisions, particularly with such loose phrase as "to be fixed later." A former senator once said that the present autonomy law is 99 percent in conformity with the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF thinks otherwise.

Another issue confronting both parties of the conflict relates to the democratic forms being used in the implementation of any solution to the problem. As usual, the GRP is inclined towards such forms as election, referendum and plebiscite while the MNLF is also thinking of forms not necessarily within the liberal-democratic tradition.

Whether or not the MNLF should be treated as the sole representative of the Filipino Muslims in negotiations is still another issue that surfaces now and then. When the Marcos Government inked the Tripoli Agreement with the MNLF in 1976 the latter was still unaffected by divisiveness. Now, Hashim Salamat has his own faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), while Dimas Pundato is associated with the MNLF-Reformist Group (MNLF-RG).

While the MNLF is officially recognized by the OIC as the sole representative of the Bangsamoro People, the Philippine government, at times, has shown its capacity to flirt with the MILF.

Prospects for the Ramos Administration

The scheduled second round of formal talks between the GRP and the MNLF in February of this year has been postponed. Among others, it implies a reduction of momentum of the peace process initiated to solve the Muslim problem. Earlier, Misuari was supposed to go to mainland Mindanao to conduct a series of consultations as part of the peace process. He has not yet left for Cotabato because of some misunderstanding on the number of security escorts he can bring. The Philippine military has limited it to 15 armed MNLF fighters plus 15 AFP personnel while Misuari has insisted otherwise.

The present government probably remembers the Aquino era when Misuari roamed the streets of Mindanao with hundreds of his followers tagging along. In the process, Misuari won a lot of publicity mileage.

The prospects of any government action would depend on the attitude of the government vis-a-vis this Muslim problem. Should it decide to grant the demand of the MNLF, it surely would meet a lot of obstacles. The Christian majority of the affected areas would understandably object and, owing to their numerical superiority, the Manila government will have to think many times over before venturing into any drastic solution. In political terms, this is rather a very tough barrier.

A few non-Muslims may go into terroristic actions just to dramatize their opposition to any genuine Muslim autonomy, more so when areas not dominated by Muslims are included. A Christian problem may take the place of a Muslim problem.

Should the Ramos government choose inaction or another round of tokenism, it could harden the minds of the Muslims. It could improve the chances of the MNLF becoming a member of the OIC and the emerging Muslim groups in the South could gain more headway in the hearts and minds of the Muslim masses. These emerging groups are better organized and well-financed. Many of them are what the West may call fundamentalists.

An interesting scenario is when some form of authoritarianism emanates from Manila. Despite repeated commitments to democracy on the part of President Ramos, this sort of scenario continues to flirt with our imagination. Based on our experience with martial law and if we have an accurate perception of the public pulse, this is not a welcome event. But in at least one sense, the Muslims may look at martial law as a lesser evil. Along majority-minority lines, it might be easier to bargain with one man than with a multitude. On this intriguing issue, let me quote again a few lines from an earlier work:

.... the Muslim grievance has a better chance of being given a just and effective response in an authoritarian setting than in a democracy. The

glaring irony proposed here is this: in a situation like ours, authoritarianism may be more democratic to minority groups than a democracy while democracy may be more tyrannical to the same groups than authoritarianism. A critical assumption of this theoretical formulation, of course, is that the authoritarian ruler is determined and committed to respond to the grievances of these minority groups. Quite unlike Marcos (Tanggol 1992).

Concluding Statements: Some Recommendations

We are into some kind of a dilemma. On the one hand, we cannot help but be pessimistic about the whole peace process. We feel betrayed by the previous governments. The actions we have seen so far on the part of the present administration are not very promising, especially in the light of our experience with the Marcos and Aquino solutions.

But this pessimism notwithstanding, we hope our perceptions are faulty, that somehow this government is genuinely committed to solve the Muslim problem. Reluctantly, we console our heart with the thought that man should live with hope not despair, optimism not pessimism, and that there is a road out of this labyrinth.

An important first requirement is the sincerity and political will of the national leadership to respond to the Muslim problem. Without this, every solution will be put to naught. A second requirement is the willingness of both parties to compromise. As someone must have said, peace is usually the child of compromise.

As our theme suggests, there is a need to reinvent government approaches vis-a-vis the Muslim problem. By reinvention, we do not mean the same incrementalist approach to policy formulation. Like a man trudging a circuitous, narrow and risky path, the government should look at both sides. On the one side is the need to respond to the demands of the Muslims for self-determination and social justice. This calls for enough political, fiscal, and administrative powers for the Muslims - some tools and space where they can cook their own food. This means enough policymaking powers for the regional legislature so regional lawmakers do not have to nibble at the existing powers of the local government units. It means sufficient taxing base so the region need not beg for money from Manila and thereby negate the concept of autonomy. It means having effective hold over the administrative machinery of the region so that goods and services are delivered faster to the people. And it means taking a qualitative and quantitative improvement in approaching the issues of area of autonomy, ancestral domain, Shariah courts, and national aid, among others (Tanggol 1992).¹

At the other side is the need to respect the rights of non-Muslims in the proposed area of autonomy who, too, were victims of history, one way or another.

It means, among others: their rightful representation to the regional government which we envision to be dominated by Muslims; their political control over the local governments they dominate and whose existing powers may be increased but never diminished; the full respect of their proprietary rights over the lands they legally acquired under Philippine laws; and their right to control local police forces in their areas so they will feel secured from possible abuse by regional police forces.

Finally, should a really autonomous (vis-a-vis self-governing) "autonomous government" be installed, we suggest some positive interference on the part of the national government over regional affairs. And this is in the area of improving the technical competence of the human-resource component of the region. The tendency to interfere for partisan political ends, which negates autonomy, should be replaced by a dedicated effort to improve the skills of regional officials and staff for all aspects of governance, which can only strengthen autonomy. For we have seen a lot of regional officials clogging the corridors of ARMM because, among others, they know nothing about their job. And, of course, when you clog the corridors of government, public administration stops!

Endnote

¹In his dissertation submitted to the UP-CPA, the author has recommended a formula of autonomy which he weighed in comparison with RA 6734 and the MNLF Proposal against such criteria as effectiveness, responsiveness, and implementability.

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