

## CULTURAL PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE: ASSESSING THE FUNCTIONS OF ETHNORELIGIOUS POLITICS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Shamsuddin L. Taya <sup>1)</sup>, Abdul M. Lantong <sup>2)</sup>, Mocamad M. Macasayon <sup>3)</sup>, Abubakar L. Ali <sup>4)</sup>

- <sup>1)</sup> Development Academy of the Bangsamoro, Office of the Chief Minister, Cotabato City, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines, [tayashamsuddin@gmail.com](mailto:tayashamsuddin@gmail.com)
- <sup>2)</sup> Department of Islamic Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mindanao State University, General Santos City, Philippines, [abdul.lantong@musgensan.edu.ph](mailto:abdul.lantong@musgensan.edu.ph)
- <sup>3)</sup> Department of Public Administration, College of Business and Public Administration, Cotabato State University, Cotabato City, Philippines, [mmocamad@yahoo.com](mailto:mmocamad@yahoo.com)
- <sup>4)</sup> Department of Islamic Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, Cotabato State University, Cotabato City, Philippines, [abubakaralipeace@gmail.com](mailto:abubakaralipeace@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Any general effort to account for the influence of ethnoreligiosity in the Philippines raises the question of the dominant role ethnoreligious politics has taken. Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine and analyze the role of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines, using the Cultural Pluralist perspective. To this theory, the melting pot has never eradicated ethnoreligious politics in any given country. It is divided into three parts. Firstly, it deals with the economic function of ethnoreligious politics in the region. Secondly, it looks into the psychological role of ethnoreligious politics. Lastly, examines the civic role of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines. As shown in this article, many people in the Philippines have been unified from time to time by ethnoreligious bonds and used politics to secure material goals, to satisfy their psychic needs, and on occasion, to bring about fundamental changes in their civic values. Therefore, it is indicated that ethnoreligious politics serves as a tool in achieving their material desires, psychological needs, and recognition of their civic values.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Pluralist Perspective, Ethnoreligious Politics, Philippines*

### ABSTRAK

Setiap upaya umum dalam menjelaskan pengaruh etnoreligiusitas di Filipina menimbulkan pertanyaan mendasar tentang peran dominan yang diambil oleh politik etnoreligius. Dengan demikian, tujuan artikel ini adalah mengkaji dan menganalisis peran politik etnoreligius di Filipina dengan menggunakan perspektif Kultural Pluralis. Menurut teori ini, politik etnoreligius tidak dapat dihapuskan di negara mana pun. Hal ini berhubungan dengan tiga hal pokok. Pertama, berkaitan dengan fungsi ekonomi politik etnoreligius di wilayah tersebut. Kedua, melihat peran psikologis politik etnoreligius. Terakhir, mengkaji peran politik sipil etnoreligius di Filipina. Seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam artikel ini, banyak orang Filipina telah dipersatukan dari waktu ke waktu oleh ikatan etnoreligiusitas dan menggunakan politik etnoreligius untuk mengamankan tujuan material, memenuhi kebutuhan psikis, dan kadang-kadang membawa perubahan mendasar dalam nilai-nilai kewarganegaraan mereka. Oleh karena itu, diindikasikan bahwa politik etnoreligius berfungsi sebagai alat untuk mencapai berbagai kepentingan dari para penganutnya.

**Kata Kunci:** Perspektif Kultural Pluralis, Politik Etnoreligius, Filipina

## PRELIMINARY

Generally, divisive and often violent ethnoreligious politics have been a global phenomenon, which has torn apart many countries of the world. Many countries have suffered and some will continue to suffer from the brunt of ethnoreligious politics in their domestic conflicts. In the light of this, therefore, this article is quite timely and relevant in this period of the political history of the Philippines. We hope that the analysis will help our readers to have a better understanding of the most acute decades and domestic problems that the Philippine society confronts today. A few years ago, many pundits and political leaders mistakenly thought that we were about to close the chapter of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines; that is, from politics to history, as a something of the past; when we all thought that the melting pot through Manila's policy of integration seemed to have made remarkable progress towards its goal, that is, the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, in both practical and acceptable to the parties involved and would lead to the coexistence of ethnically and tribally divided society to a greater future, everything, however, turned to the other way round (Taya, 2010: 19-20).

The failure of the peace agreements between the government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Bangsamoro revolutionary groups displayed a surprising persistence of discord and tension in the Philippines in general and in the Bangsamoro homeland in particular. This is a huge unfinished task of nation-building that the Manila government must pay attention to with urgency. Failure to do so may aggravate these distinctions that people have drawn along regional, economic, occupational, and ideological lines; they may involve clearly defined material and psychological interests which we already identified as "political". Among the common distinctions that have brought people together are those which we designate as "ethnic" that is, those distinctions based on race, tribe, religion, language, and other broadly defined cultural attributes (Taya, 2010: 19-20). Such bond has natural and universal character as discussed in Ibn Khaldun's "theory of *assabiyah*" (Khaldun, 2015; Amin, 2019).

However, sometimes they cut across such divisions, but provide unity where none seemed to be possible. This is natural since affiliation not only would ensure one's protection and safety but also provide an avenue of respect and recognition from other existing ethnoreligious groupings. Ethnoreligious politics should not be viewed as a parochial phenomenon, for there are few places on earth, developed or underdeveloped, where ethnoreligiosity is not presently of political significance.

In addition, these points merely scratch the surface. This is true, especially in the Southeast Asian region in general and in the Philippines, in particular. The Philippines is characterized by cultural, religious, and linguistic conglomeration, a fact that has led its polity to experience some share of ethnoreligious politics. With this, a fundamental question would arise: What is the function of ethnoreligious politics in promoting, preserving, and advancing the interest of each individual and their respective ethnoreligious groups? Thus, the objective of this article is to examine and analyze the function of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines, using the Cultural Pluralist perspective.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The article used qualitative research methods. It relied on the historical-analytical approach, content analysis of official documents, and a wide range of secondary scholarly material sources. Interviews with respondents in the Bangsamoro homeland were also conducted. This method allowed us to examine and analyze the role of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines. Thus, this article mainly highlighted how ethnoreligious politics is used as an instrument in pursuance of one's individuals or collective interests.

In assessing the role of ethnoreligious politics in the Philippines, this article utilized the theory of Cultural Pluralism. With the passage of time and the increasing trends of intermarriage, among other intensive and extensive human interactions, ethnic uniqueness has gradually diminished. What is striking, however, some argued, is not the scope and rapidity of assimilation, but rather the persistence of un-assimilated ethnoreligious identities of the Philippines society (Taya, 2010: 21-2). To this school of thought, the melting pot has never eradicated ethnoreligious politics in any given country. To these elements, the Philippines still retains rather clear, long-standing ethnoreligious politics distinctions which are operative in the country's social and political life and have shown every evidence of persistence. Rather than a melting pot, however, if not all countries-including the Philippines- is a patchwork of ethnoreligious politics enclaves. In correlation with the above, Taya stated thus:

“The dominance of the Christian-Filipino culture should not force us to overlook the great variety of ... minority group ties that still exist in the Philippines. He further noted that some argued that such proponents of cultural pluralism ... cooperating voluntarily and autonomously, but within the united Philippines, in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind. Such has been the official stance of those westernized Bangsamoro intellectuals and political leaders.” (Taya, 2010: 21-2).

Thus, during the regime of then-President Ferdinand E. Marcos (1965–1986), there was a concerted effort to accommodate the Bangsamoro land through granting the region a measure of self-autonomy, but it was not implemented in good faith. During the time of former President Corazon C. Aquino (1986–1992), Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created supposedly to fulfill the promise of the Philippines government to give self-determination to the Bangsamoro people through the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The Philippines government partially implemented the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, which the MNLF leadership rejected. As a result, the Aquino administration unilaterally implemented it and chose Zakaria Candao as the governor of the ARMM. Again, in 1996, Manila and MNLF signed the 1996 Jakarta Agreement, which also failed to address the conflict in the region. Currently, the Philippine government under the watch of the Philippines President offered another autonomous government (BARMM) to replace the ARMM upon its ratification through a plebiscite on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Material Goals: Economic and Ethnoreligious Patronage**

Economic deprivation does explain the political pull of ethnoreligiosity. Most groups, especially the minority groups who were deprived of economic opportunities by the dominant groups and, particularly, the majority groups, were forced to join politics in order to provide essential social services and economic advancement. To achieve these goals, some deprived groups either actively worked within the existing legal framework or outside of it or both, joined politics. Schock's work is a comprehensive model for understanding conflicts that drive ethnoreligious conflict and their right to secede. He discussed three theories of conflicts. One of those is the relative deprivation theory that can be defined as the perceived gap between people's value expectations and their value abilities, that is, the discrepancy between what people think they should get from society's abundance and what they believe they actually do get (Schock, 1996: 101).

In the light of the above, if we examine the case of the minorities in the Southern Philippines, in general, and the Bangsamoro people, in particular, there are several important economic reasons that forced the Bangsamoro and other minorities such as, the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) to turn to ethnoreligious politics. One of the most contentious issues is the issue of state sponsored-land-grabbing in the name of human settlement. In this context, successive Philippine governments were not just supporting the Christian-Filipino migrants from Luzon and Visayas to migrate to the Bangsamoro homeland, but more importantly, provided them with legal means to

own Bangsamoro people's lands. Manila also provided their financial means and security protection in their newly founded communities. In this regard, Taya quoted Ben J. Kadil and P. G. Gowing (1899-1920) as stating:

“The Commonwealth Government envisaged land settlement to the Bangsamoro homeland through the legislative Act No. 4197, otherwise known as the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act. This paved the way for the massive influx of Christian-Filipino settlers in the region, the Southern Philippines, with the government's backing and assistance. The Manila government had provided economic assistance and security forces for those who wanted to migrate to the region. Since then, land grabbing had been legalized at the expense of the Bangsamoro people. In 1936, President Manuel Quezon again signed a law, which declared all Bangsamoro Pusaka a Lupa (Ancestral Landholdings) as public land. This act, again, deprived the Bangsamoro's of their ancestral lands, which they had owned, from their ancestors from time immemorial. This made the Bangsamoros landless, while this act best served the interests of the Christian-Filipino settlers, and more specifically, the capitalists and loggers.” (Taya, 2009: 3; Cited in Schock, 1996: 101).

Furthermore, this land-grabbing was followed by a competition of other economic resources and political power between the Christian-Filipino settlers and the original inhabitants of the Southern Philippines, the Bangsamoro, and the Indigenous Peoples. Thus, the Bangsamoro community and other minorities became increasingly alarmed not just by the migration per se, but the magnitude of the migration of the Christian-Filipino settlers from Luzon and Visayas regions, which had made them a minority in their homeland (Taya, 2009: 3).

When the United States granted Philippine independence in 1946, the Bangsamoro continued to resist the newly born nation's rule that escalated into widespread conflict in the 1970s. The immediate reasons for the conflict was as a result of the increasing massacres, genocides, and other atrocities committed against the Bangsamoros by the Philippine government and its backed Christian-militia (ILAGA) in the Southern Philippines during the late 1960s. The Jabidah Massacre was the starting point, when Datu Udtog Matalam staged a rebellion in 1968 and eventually established the Mindanao Independent Movement (MIM), two months after the Jabidah Massacre on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1968 (Taya, 2009: 3).

In its initial phases, the rebellion was a series of isolated uprisings that rapidly spread in scope and size. But one group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), chaired by Nur Misuari, managed to bring most partisan Bangsamoro forces into a loosely unified MNLF framework. As a result of this, the vibrancy of Nur Misuari and the Bangsamoro leaders agreed that Nur Misuari be the chairman of the MNLF (Taya, 2009: 3).

Fighting for an independent Bangsamoro nation, the MNLF received massive support from both homeland and foreign Muslim backers, more specifically, Libya, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

and Malaysia. When the conflict reached its peak in 1973-75, the military arm of the MNLF, the Bangsamoro Army was able to field more or less 30,000-armed fighters (Taya, 2009: 3). The Philippine military responded by deploying 80 percent of its combat force against the Bangsamoro (Taya, 2009: 3). Destruction and casualties, both military and civilian, were heavy; and an estimated 50,000 people were killed (Taya, 2009). Also, from 1972 to 1976 an estimated 150,000 Bangsamoros were killed, and more than 500,000 were forced to seek refuge in Sabah, Malaysia. In addition, more than one million were rendered homeless and destitute in the Southern Philippines (Bangsamoro Watch Center, 5; Cited also in Taya, 2009: 3).

Accordingly, other factors that aggravated ethnoreligious politics in the Southern Philippines among other things is Manila's naiveness and state of denial in addressing seriously the so-called Bangsamoro question. Before the Former Philippines President Aquino III and the current administration of President Duterte, the Christian-Filipinos' political establishment was not serious in addressing the Bangsamoro problem through correcting historical injustice committed by the Philippines government against the Bangsamoro people. This can be seen through a series of political peace settlements signed by both parties. For instance, the Two Peace Agreements (The 1976 Tripoli and the 1996 Jakarta Agreements) are the best illustration of this discrepancy. In this respect, Buendia argued that the conclusion of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between Manila and MNLF did not terminate the separatist movement in the Southern Philippines (Buendia, 2004: 205-6) because the Philippines government could not deliver the expectations of the MNLF and the Bangsamoro people. As a result, frustration and anger prevailed again. So, in 2001, Misuari staged the rebellion once again, which claimed more than a hundred lives. Rizal G. Buendia also noted the ignominious failure of Misuari to effectively wield governmental powers to attain the Bangsamoro's quest for lasting and viable peace over their homeland was also a factor (Buendia, 2004: 205-6).

Allying with the above, therefore, ethnoreligiosity in the Southern Philippines and perhaps elsewhere is practically synonymous with low socioeconomic status in which members occupy minority positions of deprivation and discrimination, they aim to wrestle material benefits and values from the center. These peripheral groups knew that the dominant political groups would not voluntarily relinquish material values to the deprived areas at the same time, while the marginalized groups cannot live on the crumbs from the table of the dominant power-holders. Obviously, the onus of poverty, neglect and economic deprivation has led ethnoreligious politics in the south to seek political redress throughout the political history of the independent Philippines. Thus, based on the above analysis, it depicts that one of the causes of ethnoreligious politics in the Southern

Philippines is due to economic deprivation by the majority Christian-Filipino people over the Bangsamoro minority people in the region.

## **2. Psychic Goals: The Esteem of the Victim**

Nation-building in the Philippines is considered by many observers as an unfinished task of the Philippines government. Since the onset of the country's independence, the Manila political establishment has struggled to make a united nation by integrating the Bangsamoro people and other minority groups into the Philippines' national body politics. This was done through an establishment of an agency- the Commission on National Integration (CNI). CNI was tasked to formulate a national integration policy and carry it out to ensure obedience and success of Philippines nation-building.

However, the Bangsamoro homeland was a uniquely illustrative case of challenges encountered at the intersection of post-colonialism and ethnoreligious disputes. When the United States granted independence to the Philippines in 1946, the Bangsamoro homeland faced a dilemma not just only of the annexation of their homeland into the Philippines sovereignty and territorial integrity, but worse is an attempt of Manila regimes to assimilate socially and culturally the Bangsamoro community into a dominant Christian-Filipinos' values. So, proud of their Islamic cultural identity and independence, the Bangsamoro people bent on preserving them, which consequently led to a series of conflicts and often skirmishes between the Christian-Filipinos and the Bangsamoro. This hostile relation was succinctly described by Jeffrey Ayala Milligan (2005) in his work titled "Islamic Identity, Post-Coloniality and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines", when he claimed that more than 65 percent of the Bangsamoro people surveyed in 1971 rejected the integration policy of the Philippines government and therefore, identified themselves as Bangsamoro rather than Filipinos (Milligan, 2005: 99-100). He also quoted Cesar Majul as noting that the fact that the Bangsamoro independence movements started to grow in the 1960s appeared that Philippines national integration failed to assimilate the bulk of the Bangsamoro community (Milligan, 2005: 99-100).

Therefore, the ethnoreligious groups of the Southern Philippines, more specifically, the Bangsamoro people felt that their lack of status is due to discrimination and other structural inequalities designed and perpetuated by the Manila government. The movement for self-determination in the Southern Philippines is generally attributed to the desire of many Bangsamoros to create their institutions to replenish social, psychological, and cultural values that could not find fulfillment in the larger Philippines society (Taya, 2009: 42). Bangsamoro

independence movements, in general, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in particular, developed distinct organizations and cultural practices to compensate for dissatisfaction over the existing antagonistic sociopolitical and cultural order of mainly dominated Christian-Filipino leadership. Politically, economically, culturally, and socially, the Bangsamoro were/are deprived and burdened with a deep feeling of socioeconomic and political inferiority. Many Bangsamoro lived in desolation and squalor, beset by every known kind of social pathology.

Consequently, and as a result of the above, most of the Bangsamoro went to the extreme of calling attention to the existence of *sistema a sarwang* a governor or an internal colonial system” which has led to resource allocation along “tribal or religious lines.” For the ethnoreligious failure to achieve status, one could blame a discriminatory society, a society dominated by the Christianized elements, who also profess Christianity. Thus, the ethnic does not place the onus of poverty and material success in the individual.

While concerned with the pursuit of material goals as a primary objective, ethnoreligious politics has also stressed compensatory efforts to acquire honor, dignity, respect, and self-esteem. Muslim best described this when he quoted Datu Pisang (famous Bangsamoro leader) as saying:

“When the Spaniards ‘discovered’ these islands (the Southern Philippines) they found that civilization had already been established here, the religion and civilization of Islam. It was a good religion and a real civilization. You may remember also or have read that in all years, Spain was here and she never really conquered the Bangsamoro. Therefore, at the Treaty of Paris after the Spanish-American war, Spain had no right to give the Bangsamoro homeland to the United States, rights neither of discovery nor conquest. This is what the Bangsamoro is.” (Muslim, 1994: 49; Cited in Taya, 2010: 29).

These feelings of rejection, to some, resulted in the withdrawal from Philippines politics, cultivate studied apathy, and the creation of social situations in which one was esteemed despite his ethnoreligious affiliation. This was the case, for instance, with some Bangsamoros who had attained material success and education and selected to live in the north. These are then some of the non-political ways in which ethnoreligious politics of the Philippines coped with the problems of group and individual self-esteem.

However, ethnoreligious group members could not always resort to this sense of withdrawal and resignation. For the majority of ethnoreligious groups (such as the Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug, Iranun, Yakan, and others) in the Southern Philippines, the political organization provided them an avenue for the stormy expression of psychic rewards, acute ethnoreligious resentment, and the longing for recognition of one’s human worth. The politics of separatism also provided ethnoreligious groups of the region with a means of seeking recognition and respect. A typical



example is the establishment of the MILF as an avenue to protect and advance the Bangsamoro multi-ethnoreligious groups in the Southern Philippines. These politics of recognition and respect was in most cases a search for confirmation that public officials in Manila would listen only to the marginalized Bangsamoro through the language of force, and thus, has a symbolic value to group members (Taya, 2010: 29).

This feeling of neglect by ethnics was perhaps behind the blunt refusal of many Bangsamoros ethnoreligious groups to be part of the Philippines system. Because of the lack of recognition, and admittedly, by way of reaction, many of the aspirants for power fell back on their ethnic and regional constituencies, leading to the emergence of several ethnically based and possibly ethnically biased political movements. But this does not imply that all groupings are only purely ethnically-based associations or organizations. Some leading organizations are ethnically combined.

Accordingly, unlike other Bangsamoro revolutionary groups- such as Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF), Maute Group- the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) sought to unite co-ethnics into a broad political coalition with a common politico-religious creed transcending specific claims and identifications. In this respect, the MILF is a perfect referent of ethnically combined organizations. For instance, MILF members and leadership are composed of different tribes from 13 Bangsamoro ethnoreligious groups of the Southern Philippines. These include the Maguindanaon of Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sarangani, the Maranao of Lanao del Sur and Lanao de Norte, the Tausug of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan and Zamboanga provinces, the Sama of Tawi-Tawi, the Yakan of Basilan, the Sangil of South Cotabato and Sarangani, the Badjao (Sama Dilaut) of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan, the Kalibugan of Zamboanga provinces, the Jama Mapun of Tawi-Tawi, the Iranun of Lanao, Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces, the Kalagan of Davao provinces, the Palawani of Palawan and the Molbog of Southern Palawan. Therefore, a refusal by the Majority dominated Christian-Filipinos' Philippine government to bestow recognition on members of the marginalized Bangsamoro community seems to be one of the given factors that led to the emergence of many ethnically-based organizations in the Southern Philippines, in general, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in particular.

### **3. Civic Values as Ethnoreligious Political Goals**

Ethnic-based political behaviors have conditioned basic Christian-Filipino civic values that are the root ideas about the form and content of the controversial permanent Philippines

constitution of the country and the structure and purposes of the government itself. Such critical effects fly in the face of a core culture interpretation that holds inherited political values as sacrosanct and enduring. Two major examples will help to clarify this point: One is the great emphasis on government as an agency of collective benefits and the demand for the fair distribution of wealth and opportunities. While the other is the vehement and mounting opposition by the Christian-Filipinos against the Bangsamoro quest for self-determination in the Southern Philippines.

Also, let us look at the emphasis on government as an agency of collective benefits and the demand for the fair distribution of wealth and opportunities. Independence movements in the Southern are mainly a product of persecution, oppression, and injustice against the Bangsamoro people by successive Philippines governments and their agents. In response, the Bangsamoro people moved out from the Philippine institutions and established their organizations like MNLF, MILF, and others that provide them protection and recognition of their worth as citizens of the country which led to a series of conflicts and often skirmishes between the Philippines government and the Bangsamoro, particularly, the Bangsamoro insurgents.

The decade-long violent armed confrontation in the Southern Philippines is rooted in a historical injustice committed by the Manila regimes and its agents against the Bangsamoro people. The oppressive Philippines government, national assimilation policies, as well as illegal and immoral land-grabbing, and other oppressive and unjust economic measures sanctioned against the Bangsamoro community by the former caused the latter a loss of their political and economic powers over their homeland, the Bangsamoro homeland. These situations compelled the Bangsamoro people to organize independence movements, like MNLF, MILF, etc., to engage in a violent protracted war against the Philippines government since the onset of the 1970s.

Therefore, to address the so-called Bangsamoro problem, Manila regimes signed many peace treaties, the Tripoli Agreement in 1976, the Jakarta Final Peace Agreement in 1996, the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro in 2012, and the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro in 2014, with the Bangsamoro revolutionary groups. The first two agreements between the Governments of the Philippines with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) failed to address the Bangsamoro question. As a result, feelings of frustration ran high among the Bangsamoro people. One of the most remarkable effects of these frustrations was the combined takeover of Maute and ASG over one of the cities of the Philippines, the Marawi City. Worried about the possibilities of similar incidents, the Philippines government decided to grant genuine autonomy to the Bangsamoro people. This can be seen in the voice of the Senator below:

“The Bangsamoro will allow them self-governance that will put an end to their feeling of alienation which for decades has fueled their rebellion. He further said that “Mr. President, I do not want to sound like a warmonger, but if we do not heed this clamor for change in the Bangsamoro, God forbid, restlessness among the armed groups in Mindanao could go out of control. The possibility of another Marawi siege would not be far from the horizon. The country can no longer afford more bloodshed. Our generation has suffered long enough from the clutches of poverty and the evils of war. Let not our children and their future suffer some more. Never Mr. President, never, he concluded.” (Senator Juan Miguel F. Zubiri, 28 February 2018).

Accordingly, others such as the vehement and mounting of opposition by the Christian-Filipinos in the country, in general, and the Christian-Filipino settlers (including some Bangsamoro leaders who are benefitting from the current broken Philippine system) in the South, against Bangsamoro Autonomous Regional in Muslim Mindanao known as Bangsamoro Organic Law or BOL that was ratified by the Philippine Congress and signed by Philippines President Rodrigo Roa Duterte under Republic Act 11054 in July 2018. Opponents of the Bangsamoro BOL raised issues of legality such as the unconstitutionality of sharing arrangements between the Central government and the envisioned future Bangsamoro regional government. They also raised the status of Indigenous People (IPs) and Christian-Filipino settlers within the Bangsamoro territory. In this regard, the opponents of the Bangsamoro Basic Law or BBL (now BOL) argued that the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB), in general, and the passing of the BOL, in particular, would require amending the 1987 Constitution as it plans to create a Bangsamoro sovereign state and its eventual separation from the Philippines which many experts disagreed.

However, the “Mamasapano incident” gave ammunition for the anti-BBL groups to block the passage of the BBL by the Philippines Congress. It was an incident (the Mamasapano) that happened during a Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippines National Police (PNP) (allegedly joined by United States Army Special Forces) against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the MILF to capture or kill wanted Malaysian terrorist and bomb-maker Zulkifli Abdir and other Malaysian terrorists or high-ranking members of the BIFF which took place on January 25, 2015, at Tukanalipao, Mamasapano, Maguindanao, Philippines. Consequently, several legislators pressed for the deletion of some of the provisions of the proposed law (BBL) which they considered to be unconstitutional, including the establishment of separate constitutional bodies, as well as the establishment of a Bangsamoro police force in the proposed autonomous region which the MILF warned the former not to do. The MILF insisted that any revised BBL version which is not FAB and CAB compliant would not be acceptable to them. In the end, in February 2016, the leadership of both Houses (the House of the Senate and the House of Representative) declared that

they can no longer pass the BBL due to a lack of quorum on the House of the Representative which the MILF called as an excuse.

Nonetheless, for the supporters of the GPH-MILF peace process, in general, and, the BOL, in particular, they believed that their supports have been anchored in the very letter and spirit of the 1987 Philippine Constitution whose primary objective is for the achievement of peace and development for its people including the Bangsamoro. To substantiate their arguments, they highlighted the primacy of peace and stability in the country as a whole that can only be achieved through the recognition and entrenchment of the BOL in the 1987 Philippines Constitution through a legislative process (Philippine News Agency, 9 May 2017; Abubakar, 2017).

Fortunately, the current administration of Philippine's President Rodrigo Roa Duterte was determined to solve the Bangsamoro problem by addressing what they called historical injustice. To accelerate the process, President Duterte certified the bill as an urgent bill. As a result, the Philippine Congress was able to prioritize the passage of the bill and ratified it in July 2018 as pointed out earlier. Then, on 27 July 2018 Dawan (2018) revealed that Philippine President Duterte signed Republic Act No. 11054, or Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao into law.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above analysis, the article demonstrated empirical evidence which indicated the function of ethnoreligious politics in aiding both individuals and groups to promote, preserve and advance their respective interests. As such, we can safely conclude that many people in the Philippines have been unified together from time to time by ethnoreligious bonds because they used it (ethnoreligious politics) to secure their material goals, to satisfy their psychic needs, and on some occasions, to bring about fundamental changes in civic values to their favors. And, finally, the authors recommend that the GPH should provide a conducive environment that would address the cause of ethnoreligious politics in the southern Philippines, to eliminate them.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abubakar, C. A. (2017). Review of the Mindanao Peace Processes. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 5(3), 450-464.
- Amin, K. (2019, March). Masyarakat Badawah dan Hadarah: Suatu Telaah Sosiologi Ibn Khaldun. *In Proceeding: International Conference on Islamic Studies (ICIS) IAIN Ponorogo* (pp. 235-245).

- Buendia, R. G. (2004). *The GRP-MILF Peace Talks: Quo Vadis?. In Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (pp. 205-222). ISEAS Publishing.
- Che Man, W. K. (1990). *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of the Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kadil, B. J. (2002). *History of the Moro and Indigenous Peoples in Minsupala*. Mindanao: Mindanao State University.
- Khaldun, I. (2015). *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History-Abridged Edition*. Princeton University Press.
- Lantong, M. A. (2018). Islam and Colonialism: The Response of the Muslims in the Southern Philippines to Western Colonialism and Legacies. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 547-567.
- Majul, C. A. (1985). *Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines*. Berkeley: Mizan Press.
- Milligan, J. A. (2020). *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines*. Springer Nature.
- Muslim, M. A. (1994). *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*. Marawi City: Office of the President and College Affairs Mindanao State University.
- Nurdin, A. (2020). Dialectics in Relationship between Religion and State: A Correlation of Religious Principles and Ideals of Law in Indonesia. *Al-Bayyinah*, 4(1), 105-117.
- Omar, R., Islam, R., Aziz Yaacob, C. M., & Taya, S. L. (2020). Relevance of Fisher's Model of Third Party Intervention: The Case of Malaysia's Mediation to the Bangsamoro Conflicts. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Engineering and Technology*, 11(6).
- Schock, K. (1996). A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 40(1), 98-133.
- Taya, S. L. (2009). *Strategies and Tactics of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Southern Philippines*. Sintok: UUM Press.
- Taya, S. L. (2010). The Politicization of Ethnic Sentiments in the Southern Philippines: The Case of the Bangsamoro. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(1), 19-34.
- Zubiri, J. M. F. (28 February 2018). Sponsorship Speech on Senate Bill No. 1717 or the Bangsamoro Basic Law under Committee Report No. 255, delivered by Senator Juan Miguel F. Zubiri, chair of the Senate Sub-committee.