

2 DEFINING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

DEFINING THE IDENTITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

ADB, in its Policy on Indigenous Peoples,⁴ notes the key concepts of self-identification; linguistic identity; distinct social, cultural, economic, and political systems; and unique ties to ancestral territories. Two significant characteristics of indigenous peoples are observed:

- descent from population groups present in a given area, most often before modern states or territories were created and before modern borders were defined; and
- maintenance of cultural identities; and social, economic, cultural, and political institutions separate from mainstream or dominant societies and cultures. In some cases, over recent centuries, tribal groups or cultural minorities have migrated into areas to which they are not indigenous, but have established a presence and continue to maintain a definite and separate social and cultural identity and related social institutions. In such cases, the second identifying characteristic would carry a greater weight.

ADB uses the following working definition of indigenous peoples in its operations.

Indigenous peoples should be regarded as those with a social or cultural identity distinct from the dominant or mainstream society, which makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the processes of development.

To date, the Philippines is the only country in Asia that has officially used the term *indigenous peoples* and

recognized their rights as such. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), enacted in 1997, defines indigenous peoples as follows.

A group of people or homogeneous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCs/IPs [indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples] shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains. IPRA, Chapter II, Section 3h).

Inherent in this definition are factors such as historical continuity, self-identification, and group membership.

Historical continuity is characterized by occupation of ancestral lands/domains, or at least part of them; common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands; culture in general or specific manifestations of it; and language and residence, whether in their lands of origin or evicted from it.

The concept of self-identification is inextricably related to group membership, identity, and history. The thread that weaves these factors together is the indigenous peoples' attachment to land and territory.

NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES

Despite efforts to define indigenous peoples, there is still no consensus as to exactly who are the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. This is due to the absence of up-to-date cultural mapping in this country. Another reason is the tenuous way in which indigenous peoples' identities have been constructed by themselves and others (for political, religious, and other reasons). This problem of "contesting identities" is best illustrated in the case of the indigenous peoples in Mindanao.

It is not easy to label the identities of peoples of the geographic region known as Mindanao, since the criteria for doing so are not fixed. Even supposedly monolithic categories such as "Moro" are not immutable. Political expression of the Moro as an identity has undergone some variations in recent years. There are also other overlapping layers of identities that cut across ethnic and religious boundaries. Thus, the best that can be achieved is an attempt at categorizing peoples based on (mostly) external criteria, rather than self-identification.

The dichotomy between Moro and Lumad is a historical creation—i.e., a result of the process of Islamization. Until now, common origin stories abound among Muslims and Lumads. In their folklore, Muslim and non-Muslim groups claim the same ancestry. For example, the oral literature of the Subanen of Zamboanga refers to four legendary brothers: Tabunaway, who brought forth the Maguindanao; Dumalandan, who sired the Maranao; Mili-irid, who begot the Tiruray; and Gumabon-gabon who was the ancestor of the Subanen.⁵

The Manobo and Maguindanao of the former Cotabato Province recount the story of the brothers Tabunaway and Mamalu, who were their common ancestors. In the Manobos version of the story, they also share the same ancestor as the Ilyanun, the Matigsalug, the Talandig, and the Maranaw. Tiruray legends also speak of Tabunaway and Mamalu as their ancestors.⁶

The introduction of Islam split the peoples of Mindanao into two distinct categories, Moros and Lumads. Those who adopted Islam became the Moros and those who did not became the Lumads, a Visayan term which means "born of the earth." Lumads are regarded as the original inhabitants of Mindanao. Lumad also now refers to the non-Muslim, non-Christian indigenous peoples of Mindanao.

There are at least 13 Islamized ethnolinguistic groups indigenous to Mindanao.⁷ They are the Maranaw, Maguindanao, Tausug, Yakan, Samal, Sangil, Molbog, Kalibugan, Kalagan, Palawani, Iranun, Jama Mapun, and the Badjao.

The 18 non-Muslim or Lumad groups are the Bagobo of Davao del Sur, South and North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat; Mansaka of Davao del Norte; Mandaya of Davao Oriental; Subanen of the Zamboanga Peninsula; B'laan of Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Sultan Kudarat; T'boli of South Cotabato; and Tiruray of North Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat.

The Manobo encompass various tribes that are also considered Lumad because they are found in Mindanao—in Agusan del Sur and Norte, Davao, and Cotabato.

Other Manobo tribes include the Higaonon of Agusan and Misamis Oriental; Bukidnon of Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental; Talaandig of Bukidnon; Matigsalug of Bukidnon and Davao del Sur; Umayamnon of Agusan and Bukidnon; Dibabawon of Agusan and Davao; Banwaon of Agusan and Misamis Oriental; Talaingod of Davao del Norte; Tagakaolo of Davao Sur; Ubo of South Cotabato; Tasaday of South Cotabato; B'lit of South Cotabato; and Mangguangan of Davao del Norte and Sur, and Cotabato.

In Mindanao society, ethnic identity forms the core of all other layers of socially constructed identities. An individual is identified first by his or her ethnic affiliation. Religion is now also a key element in the differentiation and construction of these identities. Through the years, many members of the ethnolinguistic groups have adopted Islam as a way of life. Some converted to Christianity, while others, the Lumads, held on to their indigenous beliefs, practices, and traditions.

The terms *Muslim* and *Moro* have been used interchangeably to refer to those people who have adopted Islam as a religion and a way of life. However, *Muslim* refers to a universal religious identity, while *Moro*

denotes a political identity distinct to the Islamized peoples of Mindanao and Sulu. The Spanish colonizers originally used the term for peoples of Mindanao who shared the religion of the Moors who had once colonized Spain. The term *Moro* was used in the same derogatory way as the term *Indio* for Filipinos from Luzon and the Visayas whom they converted to Christianity.⁸

From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, Moro intellectuals reclaimed the term *Moro* in their efforts to “imagine” a distinct Moro identity. Triggered by the Jabida massacre of 1968, among others, Moro intellectuals led by Nur Misuari created and popularized the *Bangsamoro* identity. *Bangsamoro* became an inspiration, a concept that connoted a peoples’ shared identity and vision for a new nation. Such claims to nationhood may not be validated by historical evidence, but the term has gained cogency and acceptance. It has inspired among members of Muslim society a subjective feeling of being one. It has also assumed the following characteristics: it is anticolonial and inspired by a tradition of resistance, it is anti-elite, it is distinctly Islamic, and it is rooted in a struggle for justice.⁹

The Moros expressed their consciousness of a nation through a political struggle for self-determination and in 1969 formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Islam is central to the development of Moro identity. It serves to unite the 13 ethnolinguistic groups that form the so-called “Moro Nation.” By interfacing religious doctrines and (Moro) nationalist ideas, the goal to establish the Moro Nation became necessarily a goal to preserve Islam and Islamic culture.¹⁰

In the 1980s, the project to build a *Bangsamoro* began to manifest some cracks. The Moro political struggle was divided by two opposing concepts of Moro Nationalism. On the one hand, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, albeit a devout Muslim, advocated a secular brand of leadership. For him, the role of the MNLF was to uphold social justice and to lead the Moros out of their economic and social ruin. Misuari’s goal was “modernist,” and was grounded on liberal and political thought.

On the other hand, Hashim Salamat posited that Islam is the primary source of legitimacy of their struggle, and matters of faith and political leadership are not separate realms. He further argued that the *Bangsamoro*’s only guarantee for success is inspiration and guidance from the Koran and Islamic rules. For him,

leaders should be religious scholars who can apply the correct strategy and directions for the struggle, based on the Koranic scriptures. In 1984, Salamat left the MNLF to form another organization, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Political analyst and journalist Eric Gutierrez¹¹ succinctly analyzed the cause of the factionalism, thus.

At the root of the MNLF-MILF debates are their differing notions of Moro identity. The modernist MNLF adheres to an inclusive definition of that identity (including non-Muslim Christians and Lumads); while the MILF, on the other hand, adhere to a definition that proposes greater exclusivity for the Muslims. Although it tends to accommodate groups whose existence cannot be denied, thereby confirming the increasing diversification of community life and individual experiences, the MILF strives for moral consensus, internal cohesion and standardization of fundamental beliefs and values within the framework of Islam.

Where do indigenous peoples or Lumads stand amid these acrimonious debates? As may be gleaned in the above quote, both the MNLF and MILF do recognize the existence of Lumads. However, because of the claim for nationhood and the need to rally all *Bangsamoro* to a single national identity, the MILF and MNLF have not been very active in highlighting ethnic identities, to the point of dismissing the issue as irrelevant at this point.

Neither the MNLF nor MILF has clearly articulated a program for asset redistribution, including the indigenous peoples’ demand with regard to their ancestral lands. This issue is potentially and actually an explosive one, especially in Mindanao. In the recent peace negotiations, the MILF has listed the recognition of ancestral domain as a primary item in their agenda.

Meanwhile, the indigenous peoples of Mindanao have become more self-conscious and increasingly vigilant of their rights. On 17–19 January 2001, some 67 Lumad men and women leaders from 20 ethnic groups held a “Mindanao Indigenous Peoples Peace Forum” in Davao City. The gathering produced an Indigenous Peoples Peace Agenda, which they addressed to the government’s Armed Forces of the Philippines, the MILF, and the New People’s Army (a communist militant group). The statement included the following demands.

- a. That the Lumad population be sufficiently represented in any peace negotiation in Mindanao, especially in negotiations with the MILF and the NDF (National Democratic Front). The Government, however, should give special support to local initiatives on conflict resolution and transformation, like the local declaration of Lumad territories as Peace Zones.
- b. That the Senate and the House of Representatives should pass a law declaring the territories of the Lumads as autonomous. This should include the Lumad territories within the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).
- c. That all concerned should recognize and respect the territories and boundaries established by the elders during the D'yandi and Pakang times.¹² This includes territorial agreements among Lumad tribes, between Lumads and the Moros, and between Lumads and Christian settlers.
- d. That all concerned should respect our beliefs and practices and our ways of modifying them in the face of Islamic and Christian doctrines and practices, as well as the impact of globalization.
- e. That the Government should protect Lumad territories from the incursion of mining, plantations, and other projects that threaten the tribes and their environment.
- f. That local government units should pass ordinances, and even release additional funds, if possible, to reinforce the provisions and full implementation of the IPRA.
- g. That the liberating forces of the IPRA against discrimination be reinforced through joint efforts of schools, churches, the media, and other institutions.

The whole concept of *Bangsamoro* may also be debated in the light of demographic changes in Mindanao in recent years. As of 1990, there were more non-Muslim (81% of the total population) than Moro occupants (19%) of the Moro territory, which is generally considered to include the 14 provinces and 9 cities covered by the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Peace Agreement. Due to past government efforts to move settlers into the region, it is not surprising to find Ilonggo, Cebuano, Tagalog, or Ilocano speakers in one neighborhood with a mixture of Maranaw, Tausog, Maguindanao, and Arabic speakers. Small ethnic groupings, like the B'laan, T'boli, and Manobo, have their own distinct languages as well. Only 5 provinces (Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao) and one city (Marawi) remain "Muslim enclaves." These demographic changes present a major political dilemma for a wider definition of "Moro areas."

In the 1990s, the concept of *tri-people* gained wide discussion in civil society. This concept attempts to grapple with the Mindanao's multiethnic, multiple identity. The *tri-people* refers to three peoples: the majority Filipino Christian settlers, the Lumads, and the Moros. The concept has been used "not only to describe this diversity, but more importantly, in recognition of a historical process of unification."¹³ The *tri-people* concept presupposes that the Christians, Moros, and Lumads consist of three distinct peoples. Thus, the Maguindanao, Maranaw, Tausog, and other Muslim tribes are collectively called the Moro people. The Higaonon, Subanen, Tiduray, T'boli, and other non-Muslim tribes are collectively called Lumads. Those among them who have converted to Christianity are called Christians.

The construction of identities of the peoples of Mindanao continues. Certainly, these identities will be invented and reinvented amid demographic changes, political exigencies, and religious dimensions. But one thing seems constant: the ethnic dimension of identity. Ethnicity will persist as a central axis of this evolving identity—even beyond the completion of the so-called *Bangsamoro* project.