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SAKARYA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**ANALYZING THE PHILIPPINE-MORO CONFLICT:
MALAYSIA IN THE MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION
FRONT'S DISCOURSE**

MASTER THESIS

Krizza Janica MAHINAY

Department: International Relations

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ali BALCI

AUGUST 2018

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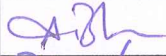
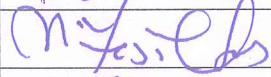
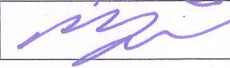
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“This thesis was accepted by the following jury on unanimity / voting on 15/08/2018.”

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PREFACE

I grew up on the island of Mindanao where the Philippine-Moro conflict is situated. Although I live in a city quite a distance from the critical areas, I was deeply affected by it because of the many news I have heard. For this reason, I decided to pursue this conflict as my thesis topic.

My aim is to tackle the aspect of the conflict not examined extensively by the previous studies, which is the relationship of the insurgent groups with international actors. In other words, I want to know how non-state actors like the Moro insurgent groups practice 'Foreign Policy.' In relation, I want to understand how they form their counter-hegemonic discourse against the state by incorporating these international actors.

This research would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my supervisor, Doç. Dr. Ali Balcı. I am grateful for the knowledge he has shared with me. I am also thankful for his constructive feedback which has helped me in honing not only my critical thinking skills but also my writing. I would also like to express my gratitude to my other professors in the International Relations Department of Sakarya University for expanding my knowledge regarding international relation theories and foreign policies. Also, I thank the Turkish Scholarship Committee (YTB) for giving me this opportunity to study with these highly respected professors.

My sincere thanks also go to my special friends who have been with me through the ups and downs. Their encouragement has empowered me throughout the writing process.

I also give my deepest gratitude to my parents, Cristina and Johnny, for always believing in me and for supporting me in reaching my dreams.

Finally, I thank God for his unconditional love and endless grace for me.

Krizza Janica MAHINAY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	: Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARMM	: Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
CNI	: Commission on National Integration
FAB	: Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
GRP	: Government of the Republic of the Philippines
ICC	: International Criminal Court
MAPHILINDO	: Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia
MILF	: Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINSUPALA	: Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan
MNLF	: Moro National Liberation Front
MNLF -EC	: Moro National Liberation Front – Executive Council
OIC	: Organization of Islamic Cooperation
SPCPD	: Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development
SSNB	: Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo
UMNO	: United Malays National Organization
UN	: United Nations
UNHCR	: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Tezin Başlığı: Filipin-Moro Çatışmasının Analizi: Moro Ulusal Kurtuluş Cephesi'nin Malezya Üzerine Anlatıları

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Nur Misuari liderliğindeki olan Moro Ulusal Kurtuluş Cephesi (MNLF), 1972'den bu yana Filipin devletine karşı olan bir Müslüman isyancı gruptur. MNLF, Filipinler Devleti'nden bağımsızlığını kazanmayı ve Bangsamoro Republik adlı bir Moro devleti kurmayı amaçlıyordu. Geçmişte, MNLF ve Malezya'nın yakın bağları vardı. Malezya hükümeti, silah ve fon sağlayarak MNLF'yi Filipinler devletine karşı destekledi. Bu esnada, Malezya, MNLF tarafından Moro halkının dini ve etnik akrabaları olarak kabul etti.

Ancak, Malezya devleti MNLF arasındaki işbirliği devam etmedi. 2001 sonra döneminde MNLF, Malezya hükümeti ve politikalarını eleştirmeye başladı. Yeni Malezya hükümetini kınamanın yanı sıra, kendisini desteklemiş olan önceki Malezya liderlerini de eleştirmektedir. MNLF, Filipin Devletini MNLF'nin ulusal vatanlarını sömürgeleştirmek ve Moro halkına karşı baskı yapmak ve komplo kurmakla suçladı. Üstelik Filipin hükümeti ve Moro İslami Kurtuluş Cephesi (MILF)'nin rakibi olan MILF arasında barış arabulucusu olarak Malezya'nın rolünü sorguladılar. MNLF grubu için, Malezya hükümetinin yeni barış müzakerelerinde yer alması, onların sömürgeci tasarımlarını sürdürmek amacıyla gerçek niyetlerini gizlemek için yapılan bir harekettir.

MNLF'nin söylemindeki bu değişimi anlama noktasında, bu tez, postyapısalcı teoriyi benimser. Bu teoriye göre, devlet ve devlet dışı aktörler, kendi kimliklerini ve varoluşlarını haklı çıkarmaya çalıştıkları bir söylem savaşına dahil olurlar. Bu mücadelede kimliklerini korumak ve kendi yetki alanlarına göre yetkilerini pekiştirmek için Dış Politika pratiklerine başvururlar. Dış Politika aracılığıyla, devlet ve devlet dışı aktörler, kimliklerini meşrulaştırmak ve iç siyasetteki diğer aktörlerin dışlanmasını normalleştirmek için yabancı devletleri ve onlarla ilişkileri araçsallaştırırlar.

Bu örnekte, bu çalışma, 2001'den sonra Filipinler'deki güç ilişkilerinde meydana gelen değişimin, MNLF'nin Moro'nun tek temsilcisi olma konumunu tehdit ettiğini ileri sürmektedir. Bu nedenle, Malezya'yı kendi söylemlerine dahil ederek meşruiyetlerini yeniden kurmaya çalışıyorlar. Başka bir deyişle, Malezya'yı, Moro halkının meşru temsilcisi olarak kimliklerini yeniden inşa ettikleri ve rakiplerini - Filipin devleti ve MILF'i - zayıflatıkları referans noktası olarak kullanıyorlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Moro Ulusal Kurtuluş Cephesi (MNLF), Filipinler, Malezya, Moro İslami Kurtuluş Cephesi (MILF), Diskur

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The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari is a Muslim insurgent group that has been against the Philippine state since 1972. The group's aim was to achieve independence from the Philippines and establish a Moro state called the Bangsamoro Republik. In the early days of its struggle, the MNLF and Malaysia had close ties. The Malaysian government supported the MNLF against the Philippines state by providing weapons and funds. Meanwhile, the MNLF referred to the Malaysians as the ethnic and religious kin of the Moros.

However, the relationship between the MNLF and Malaysia changed. After 2001, the MNLF began criticizing the Malaysian government and its policies. Besides condemning the new Malaysian government, it was also criticizing the previous Malaysian leaders who had supported the group. It accused the Malaysians of conspiring with the Philippine state in colonizing the Moro homeland and oppressing the Moro people. Moreover, the group questioned the Malaysian role as the peace mediator between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which is the rival of the MNLF. For the MNLF, the Malaysian government's involvement in the new peace negotiation was an act to hide its real intention of perpetuating its colonial designs.

In understanding this shift in the discourse of the MNLF, this thesis adopts the poststructuralist theory. According to this theory, state and non-state actors are involved in a battle of discourse, wherein they try to justify their identity and existence. In this struggle to preserve their identities and consolidate their authority over their purported subjects, the state, and the non-state actors practice Foreign Policy. Through Foreign Policy, the state and other groups found within the boundary of the state incorporate in their discourse external actors like foreign states to legitimize their identity and to normalize their exclusion of their primary enemies which threaten their identities and existence.

In this case, this study argues that the change in the power relations within the Philippines after 2001 had threatened the position of the MNLF as the sole representative of the Moros. For this reason, the group is trying to re-establish its legitimacy by incorporating Malaysia in its discourse. In other words, the group uses Malaysia as its reference point from which it reconstructs its identity as the legitimate representative of the Moro people and delegitimizes its opponents – the Philippine state and the MILF.

Keywords: Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Philippines, Malaysia, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Discourse

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine-Moro conflict has been raging for decades and throughout the years, many parties have been involved in the conflict. One of the actors involved in the struggle is the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari. The MNLF first led the contemporary Moro rebellion against the Philippine state since 1972. Its goal was to get independence from the Philippines and create a Moro state called the Bangsamoro Republik. In the early days of its struggle, the MNLF was supported by the Malaysian government. In the 1970s, the Malaysian Prime Minister and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Secretary-General, Tunku Abdul Rahman, raised the Moro case to the members of the OIC and persuaded them to support it (Zha, 2017: 7). Moreover, Malaysia was one of the countries that were vocal in condemning the reported violence against the Moros (Gross, 2007: 186). In addition, the governor of the Malaysian state of Sabah, Tun Mustapha, aided the Moro rebels by providing them with arms supplies and money. Sabah also became the location for the guerilla warfare training of the Moro fighters (Domingo, 1995: 2). Meanwhile, the MNLF proclaimed the Malaysians were brothers and sisters to the Moro people because of their affinity in religion and their historical ethnic ties.

The relation of MNLF and Malaysia, however, changed in 2001. At this point, the MNLF began condemning Malaysia and its policies. In the group's official webpage, the MNLF described Malaysia as a co-conspirator of the Philippine state in colonizing the Moro land and oppressing the Moro people. While the Philippine government illegally claimed Mindanao as part of the Philippine territory, the Malaysian state had unlawfully annexed Sabah (Misuari, 2012). These two territories were considered by the MNLF as part of the Moro national homeland. Besides this, the MNLF criticized the role of the Malaysian government as the negotiator in the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the main rival group of the MNLF. For the group, Malaysia had an underlying reason for being the mediator in the conflict. The MNLF believed that Malaysia's real goal was to prevent the Moro people from achieving real peace and freedom from the Philippine state so that it could secure Sabah for its own. (MNLF Official Website, 2012). In addition, the MNLF also accused the Malaysian government of committing inhumane actions to the Moro people, including the coercion and expulsion of the Moros from Sabah (MNLF Official Website, 2013). Finally, in a

more recent statement, Misuari implicated in his speech that Kuala Lumpur was involved in the kidnap-for-ransom incident that happened in 2000. He said that the Malaysian government had offered money to the MNLF fighters to abduct foreigners and local people. Although he did not explain the reasons for Malaysia's action, the MNLF leader said that he had evidence of the Malaysian involvement and threatened to file a case against its leaders in the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Fonbuena, 2016).

Problem

Considering this new discourse of the MNLF on Malaysia, the following question is raised: *How do we explain this shift in the MNLF's conception of Malaysia?* In relation, this thesis also asks the following question: *How did the MNLF incorporate Malaysia in its discourse which made it possible to legitimize itself as the sole and authentic representative of the Moro people and consequently, renews their struggle against the Philippine state?*

There are many explanations used to understand this change. One explanation given is that the MNLF was just exacting revenge on Malaysia after the arrest of its leader, Nur Misuari, by the Malaysian police in 2001. At that time, Misuari was fleeing from the Philippine authorities after he was charged with inciting another rebellion against the Philippine state. Misuari was hoping that after arriving in Malaysia he would be able to obtain political asylum or get a safe passage to the Middle East. However, the Malaysian authorities apprehended Misuari and later, deported him back to the Philippines where he was imprisoned for more than five years. This incident was said to have been the cause of Misuari's grudge against Malaysia (Golingai, 2016). Meanwhile, other analysts speculated that the MNLF's discourse against Malaysia reflected its disapproval of the Malaysian support on the MILF ("Nur Misuari involved", 2014). It is said that the support given by Malaysia to the MILF, combined with its role as the peace negotiator in the Philippine-MILF peace process, had pushed aside the MNLF from the negotiation table. For this reason, the MNLF was trying to discredit Malaysia to disrupt the peace negotiation of the MILF and the Philippine government.

These explanations are possible reasons for the shift in the MNLF's statements regarding Malaysia. However, there are identifiable gaps in these answers. For instance, the first explanation did not consider the reasons behind MNLF's criticisms against the previous

Malaysian leaders. Specifically, the group stated that the Malaysian government has been conniving with the Philippines against the Moro people since the 1970s. As mentioned previously, the relationship of the MNLF with Malaysia was especially good in the early days of the group's struggle. It was only during the administration of Prime Minister Mahathir that the MNLF began to have a problem with Malaysia. With this, it is a puzzle why MNLF would include in its criticism the previous Malaysian leaders. In this case, the 'revenge explanation' is not a logical answer to the MNLF's new discourse on Malaysia. Meanwhile, the second explanation also failed to explain the change in the relationship between MNLF and MILF. That is, the MNLF did not react antagonistically towards the MILF despite the latter's repeated rejection of the previous MNLF-Philippine peace agreements. Moreover, the MNLF did not feel threatened when MILF declared itself as the real representative of the Moro people in the 1980s. In fact, Misuari (1998) took pride in his intercession for the temporary cessation of hostilities between the MILF and the Philippine government. He also wished for the success of the peace talks between the two parties in 1997. In addition, the MNLF and MILF also signed a Declaration of Unity in November 2001. This historic event happened months after the MILF and the Philippine government signed in 2001 the General Framework for the Resumption of peace talks which was assisted by Malaysia (Elamparo, 2014). Thus, it could not be asserted that the current hostile relationship between MNLF and Malaysia is due to the long-time MNLF-MILF rivalry. Therefore, the explanations given by the analysts were found to be insufficient in understanding the new discourse of the MNLF on Malaysia.

These gaps, however, can be addressed by examining the issue through the lens of power relations. Thereby, this thesis posits that the shift in the discourse of the MNLF on Malaysia was incited by the change in the domestic power relations in the Philippines. This means that the position of the MNLF was threatened by the MILF and the Philippine state starting in 2001. Because of this threat, the MNLF had to reclaim itself as an important actor in the Philippine-Moro conflict by countering the discourse of its rivals. The MNLF group did this by using Malaysia as a reference point in its counter-hegemonic discourse, wherein Malaysia was reconstructed as a collaborator of the Philippine state and the MILF against the Moro people. This argument is based on Poststructuralism theory.

According to the Poststructuralism theory, the actors in the social world are engaged in a battle of discourse, which is the struggle to produce and control knowledge and truth. This knowledge underlies the interest of those who produced them (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013: 234). In other words, the battle of discourse is aimed at creating an identity and preserving the hegemony of the actors involved. Specifically, this process entails the creation of a 'self' and the 'other'. The 'self' embodies the identity which the purported subjects can identify with. Meanwhile, an 'other' is labeled as a threat to the 'self' and then, excluded from the 'self' domain. On the other hand, the constructed 'other' also engages in the same process of construction and exclusion in order to prevent its marginalization.

This discursive battle is reflected in Foreign Policy wherein an actor produces seemingly relevant policies to its purported subjects in order to align them with its interests and subsequently, consolidate its power. Anyone who opposes the policies resists the identity of the actor and therefore, must be excluded from the actor's domain. Particularly, dissident groups engage in Foreign Policy in order to produce counter-discourse against the state and other domestic actors which threaten their existence. This means that dissident groups write and speak about foreign states to reinforce and normalize their delegitimization of the primary threats to their group. That is, they use foreign states as a reference point to deconstruct the authority of the state over them or to suppress other alternative powers. In this case, to examine the change in the MNLF's discourse is to understand beforehand its power relations with the Philippine state and the MILF.

Before presenting clearly and fully the hypothesis, it is necessary to present the power dynamics within the Philippines before and after 2001. First, the MNLF was declared by the OIC as the legitimate representative of the Moro people and it was accorded an observer status by the OIC in 1975. This allowed the group to appoint themselves as the authentic source of Moro narratives. Moreover, the recognition of the MNLF as the representative of the Moro gave them the legitimacy to consolidate the Moros under its authority and mobilize them against the Philippine government. After decades of fighting, the MNLF and the Philippine leaders came to an agreement in which the Moros were promised autonomy. Thus, in 1996, Nur Misuari was appointed as the head of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and elected as the governor of Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The rest of the MNLF

fighters were also integrated into the Philippine army and the national police. For some time, the MNLF and the Philippine government had a cordial relationship. On the other hand, the MILF continued to rebel against the Philippine state, stating that autonomy was not what the Moro people needs. For them, independence was the only viable solution for the Moro problem. However, in 2001 the Philippine government initiated peace talks with the MILF wherein Malaysia served as the mediator. To spur the peace negotiation, Philippine President Arroyo decreed a plebiscite in ARMM which purportedly sought to increase the territory of the Moro. Misuari countered that this move was a violation of the pact the MNLF signed with the Philippine government. However, the government did not heed him. For this reason, the MNLF incited a rebellion but was defeated by the Philippine army. Misuari fled to Malaysia where he was arrested and sent back to the Philippines. After this incident, the Philippine government continued to focus its attention on bringing the MILF to the negotiation table. Despite this, the Arroyo administration failed to resolve the issue with the MILF. Nevertheless, the event in 2001 first led to the gradual displacement of the MNLF as the main negotiating party on behalf of the Moros. The second important event in the displacement of the MNLF occurred in 2010. The Philippine government under President Aquino III renewed the stalled peace efforts of the previous administration. The new president offered another peace agreement to the MILF. Similarly, he also requested Malaysia to serve as the negotiator between the two parties. The MILF welcomed this proposition because they thought that it would expedite the peace process. For several years, the MILF and the Philippine government negotiated until they came up with the preliminary agreement to replace ARMM with another institution. At this period, the MILF was perceived as the main negotiating party on behalf of the Moro people. On the other hand, the MNLF was excluded from the negotiation.

Hypothesis

With these conditions, this thesis reiterates its main argument which is, Malaysia was used as a reference point by the MNLF to reconstruct itself as the legitimate representative of the Moro people and to re-assert its role as the principal actor in the Moro's struggle against the Philippine state. Specifically, this thesis argues that: *To delegitimize the MILF as a representative of the Moros and to prevent the MILF-Philippine peace agreement from being fulfilled, the MNLF depicted Malaysia as a colonizer, conspirator, and un-Islamic.* Specifically, with these depictions of Malaysia, the MNLF presented the MILF

as puppets of the Philippine and Malaysian government. This means that the MILF does not seek and promote the freedom and development of the Moro people but the goals of its purported masters. In this manner, the MNLF can reassert its position as the only legitimate representative of the Moro people. Furthermore, these depictions of Malaysia instigate the re-examination of the Philippine government's agenda in choosing Malaysia as the mediator in the peace process. With this, the MNLF describes the peace negotiation offered to the MILF as not genuine in seeking peace. The group claimed that it was a strategy of the Philippine government to hide its real intention of keeping the Moros under its control. In this way, the MNLF can then renew its struggle against the Philippine state.

Objective and Method

It must be noted that this study does not investigate the accuracy of the MNLF statements. Rather, the study seeks to present the discourse of the MNLF on Malaysia and discuss how these portrayals of Malaysia has assisted the legitimization of itself as the legitimate Moro representative. With these objectives, the study examines the writings and statements made by the MNLF as a group and other individuals affiliated with the group. Particularly, the study scrutinizes the narratives of the group or specific individuals on the Malaysian government and its leaders, especially concerning certain events wherein Malaysia was involved.

To further explore these hypotheses, this thesis is divided into three parts. The first part explains deeper the Poststructuralism theory in which this examination of the Philippine-Moro conflict is anchored. In this chapter, the construction of identity, the formation of the "other", and the importance of power relations and foreign policy are discussed. The second chapter reviews the beginning of the Philippine-Moro conflict. Particularly, it retraces the Moro history from the colonial period to the present. Also, this part narrates how the division between the Moro and the Philippine state led to the eventual formation of the contemporary Moro nationalist movement. Finally, the last chapter explains how the MNLF used Malaysia as a reference point in excluding other alternative identities and re-legitimize itself as the authentic source of Moro identity. Moreover, this part explores the early relations of MNLF and Malaysia and the displacement of the MNLF as a Moro representative after 2001.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conventional understanding of foreign policy sees it as a practice of conducting diplomatic relations with each other. More often, studies about foreign policies focused on understanding the patterns of state relations and the reasons behind a specific policy. This presupposes that certain elements such as meanings, relationships, and actors are already stable (Doty, 1993: 298). However, it can be observed that there are ruptures in the state relations which cannot be explained by a conventional understanding of foreign policy. That is because it neglects an important aspect which is power. By including power, foreign policy issues are examined by assuming that subjects, meanings, and relationships are produced. This means that foreign policy is also produced wherein it underlies the interest of those who produced it. It changes accordingly to the interest and the identity of the producer. With this, it can be assumed that the state is not the only one which creates foreign policy, but it competes with other actors within the state in the production of foreign policy.

The inclusion of power means that the foreign policy is to be perceived as a site of ambiguity. This site of ambiguity, according to Ashley and Walker (1990: 261), is where power operates. This means that there is no ultimate sovereign presence and that meanings and identities are being continuously produced and contested. In relation, it can also be described as the 'field of the social' (Laclau 1990: 28), wherein different actors strive to create ideal representations around themselves. They invoke themselves as the authentic source of truth while at the same time, they relegate the others as illegitimate. This means "an individual actor, a group, a class or a political community" can take the sovereign position (Ashley, 1988: 230) through engaging in discourse. Therefore, since the dissident groups who as well produce their own versions of truth and meaning, they can also be deemed as a sovereign presence (Balci, 2017: 28).

In this case, foreign policy is not only about producing policies. It is also about constructing identity and preserving the hegemony of different actors, including the dissident groups. To put it in other words, the foreign policy that is produced is aligned with the identity of the maker. This implies that if the policy is being contested, the identity of the maker is also being contested and vice versa. To preserve the identity and the policy, any opposition must be silenced. In other words, the production of foreign

policy-identity link, actors identify an ‘other’ and attached the label of danger to it. With this, the element which threatens the stability of policy and identity can be excluded from the inside (Campbell, 1992: 70). For this reason, foreign policy is also the marking of boundaries between the domestic and international space (Ashley, 1987: 53) in order to maintain the ‘self’ and its authority.

1.1. Construction of the ‘Self’

According to Alexander Wendt (1992: 398), identity is responsible for the formation of interests. Hence, identity, as an influential variable in state decision-making, is significant in the study of state behavior and foreign policy (Theys, 2017: 37). Although many scholars recognized the importance of identity in analyzing a state’s interest/foreign policy, there is still much debate on the definition of identity and its formation. Accordingly, certain scholars argued that state identity is formed based on the international norms and cultural narratives, states interactions, or collective identities of actors within the state (Kowert, 2010). Nevertheless, they conceived the state as a unitary actor with homogeneous and static identity. In other words, they presumed that the state is inhabited by homogenous people who identify themselves with the state identity and interests. However, this is not always the case since state identity and interest is almost always contested within.

The context of the Philippines provides an example of the difficulty in aligning the people to the state interest. That is, in the Philippines, there is a geographical, linguistic, historical, religious, and economic divide among the people. Although the Philippine state tries to unite the country by instituting unifying symbols and narratives, there are still people who are displaced and cannot identify themselves with the state (Kaufman, 2013: 19). Accordingly, this is the case of the Filipinos and the Moros. The latter is alienated from the Filipinos and subsequently, they made a move to separate themselves from the Philippine state. Nevertheless, the Philippine government repeatedly tried to stall their call for separation by attempting to integrate them into the Filipino society.

This case only shows that the Philippine state identity is not attached to the supposedly homogenous characteristics of the Philippine inhabitants, but it is produced to unify the Filipinos. On the other hand, the opposition of the Moros means that the constructed identities can be contested, and another one can be constituted. This conjecture is

supported by Stuart Hall (1996: 4) who stated that identities are “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions.” In other words, the formation of identity is always a struggle between various groups who seek to establish their own identity representation. Moreover, different identities are formed side by side through the continuous discussion and debate in the society. Nevertheless, only the identities which are approved by the community can remain.

The exclusion of others temporarily creates an in-group which seems to have the same identity. This unified identity is referred to as the ‘self.’ The ‘self’ can be described as the ‘nodal point’ or ‘the center’ wherein the struggle to affix meaning is temporarily accomplished (Edkins, 1999: 98). That is to say, the ‘self’ or the ‘nodal point’ has successfully created a meaning that others can recognize and identify with (Zizek, 2008: 95). This process entails the production and dissemination of narratives about characters, events, and problems, which help form some sort of consistency and coherence in the fragmented identities (Baxter, 2016: 42). Even more so, it is the constant emphasis on who the ‘self’ is and who it is not which helps present itself as somewhat real (Balci, 2017: 35). According to Hall (1996: 2), this identification process is a never-ending step of construction, deconstruction, and re-emphasis of certain qualities or characteristics which assists in establishing the ‘self’ as the ‘hegemon’ or the ‘sovereign’ which perseveres to dominate the field of discourse in order to dictate what others can do or say.

The process of constituting the self can be illustrated by the emergence of the contemporary nationalist movement wherein the MNLF constituted the Moro identity. The MNLF depicted the Moros as people who have valiantly defended their homeland despite being continuously discriminated and persecuted by colonizers, including the Philippines (Majul, 1985: 68). In this case, anyone who condemns the oppression and violence committed by the Filipino and commits itself to the vision and mission of the Bangsamoro Republik, he or she shall be considered as a Moro (as cited in Noble, 1976: 418). With this construction of the Moro identity, the MNLF disconnects the Moros from the Filipino-Muslim identity constituted by the Philippine state and provided a common identity for the different Muslim groups. Moreover, it made the Moros part of the MNLF’s aspirations to pursue independence, which consequently gives the MNLF the status of being the legitimate representative of the Moro people.

Although it may seem that the ‘self’ has made its identity coherent, the ‘self’ remains unstable. That is because the meaning it attaches to itself and the unity it tries to establish is artificial. Moreover, the identity/meaning is merely imposed upon its purported subjects. Therefore, whoever the ‘self’ excludes constantly defies it (Hall, 1996: 5). They do it by establishing alternative representations which could remove the ‘self’ from its hegemonic position only to be replaced by others (Balci, 2017: 35).

1.2. Construction of the ‘Other’

While the ‘self’ seeks out similarities in the community to fill the absence of its intrinsic meaning, it also seeks out the differences from others (You, 2011: 4). In other words, the identity of the ‘self’ is affirmed through its recognition of the ‘other’. This idea is based upon the linguistic proposition of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida who argued that the word/sign gets its meaning in relation to the other words/signs in the language system. To put it in Saussure’s words, “their most precise characteristics is in being what the others are not” (1959: 117). But unlike Saussure who believed that meaning can be fixed, Derrida (1973: 136) argues that there is only an infinite chain of representation (*différance*) wherein the sign is represented by another and so on. Therefore, the constitution of the ‘self’ is made possible by continually referring it to the ‘other’. This also means that the completion of the ‘self’ is repeatedly suspended.

This relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is quite complex. As mentioned, the self attempts to depict itself as a perfect entity and yet it still cannot be made whole. For this reason, it needs the ‘other’ to act as a supplement. As Culler (2007: 103) describes, “the supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but ... added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.” This means that although the ‘self’ does not seem to need the ‘other’, it also cannot totally reject it. However, this does not mean that the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is treated on an equal level. As Derrida argued, the binary terms in the language system are not merely oppositional but are also hierarchical (Edkins, 1999: 66). This means that one term of each pair is given primacy over the other, while the other one is perceived as “a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption of the first” (Culler, 2007: 93). In other words, while the ‘other’ affirms the existence of the self, it simultaneously threatens the existence of the ‘self’ (Laclau, 1990: 27).

This discourse of danger is significant to the ‘self’ because it makes possible the exclusionary practices. It also means that the “imagined” boundary between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is constructed (Balci, 2017: 41). This boundary serves to demarcate between inside and outside. The inside space is characterized as rational, tranquil and civilized, while the outside space is described as irrational, chaotic, and savage (Campbell, 1992: 67). With this, the ‘self’ constitutes itself as the inside where the order is found. On the other hand, it constitutes the ‘other’ as the outside where anarchy is present. In addition, the inside/order is given more primacy than the outside/chaos (Balci, 2017: 42).

For example, the Moros wanted to free themselves from the Philippines. With this, the MNLF constituted the Philippine government as a threat to the Moro people and constructed the group as the vehicle for emancipation. Accordingly, Nur Misuari stated that the Philippine government tried to eliminate the unified Islamic consciousness, identity and culture of the Moro people and replace them with the Filipino’s own culture, which was said to be acquired from the Western Christian nations (as cited in Stern, 2012: 90). Besides this, Misuari said that the Philippine government had enacted a genocidal campaign and declared war against the Moro people (Majul, 1985: 67). As a response, the MNLF proclaimed itself as a principal instrument in achieving the goals of independence for the Moros. According to the group, its revolt against the Philippines was to create a state for the Moro people based on the system which guarantees the end of exploitation and oppression. Moreover, the group committed itself to respect the political, cultural, and religious rights of these people (Majul, 1985: 58).

The delineation of boundaries is important because it helps preserve the ‘self.’ In other words, without the constitutive outside, the ‘self’ and its identity will inevitably come apart (Laclau, 1990: 32). This is because the ‘other’ as a threat provides the justification for the ‘self’ to defend and attack the ‘other’ in order to preserve itself (Ballbach, 2015: 148). Moreover, it is the ‘other’ which assist in providing meaning to the ‘self’ and consolidates its authority.

1.3. Power Relations and Foreign Policy

The unstable and temporary division between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ can be momentarily maintained through power relations. According to Foucault, power does not only exclude or repress but it also produces the subjects and knowledge (Foucault, 1995:

194). That is to say, the act of power produces identity/meaning (Laclau, 1990: 32). This identity/meaning, which is attached to and imposed upon individuals or a group, makes them certain kinds of subjects whose behavior are restrained. For this reason, the individual or the group is subjected to the control of others and at the same time, tied to knowledge about themselves (Foucault, 1982: 781). For those who resist the imposed identity/meaning, they will be considered deviants and thusly, removed to the margins of the society.

In relation, this act of power (production, dissemination, imposition, and even the repression of meanings) is generated and conveyed through discourse (Foucault, 1978: 100). That is, discourse is the means by which identities are recognized, produced and monitored (Baxter, 2016: 37). For instance, the colonial constructions regarding Muslims in the Philippines have affected how Christian Filipinos perceived them (Angeles, 2010: 29). In their literary works and official reports, the Spaniards used 'Moro' to refer to the Muslim inhabitants of the country, especially in Mindanao. This term, in addition, was used negatively as it was attached to traits such as cunning, traitors, suspicious, cowards, and violence (Angeles, 2010: 32). This representation was further emphasized in the Spanish drama/comedic play called "Moro-Moro", which always depicts the Muslims as the villain and the Christians as the heroes. The American colonizers, who followed after the Spaniards, also used the term 'Moro' negatively in their discourse. They link the term to polygamy and slavery which are considered unacceptable to American society (Angeles, 2010: 43). Through these representations, the colonizers imposed upon the people that they need to be Christianize in order to be civilized like them (Angeles, 2010: 31). Accordingly, the Christian Filipino has accepted this representation and has viewed the Muslims as the "other." These negative perceptions have endured in the postcolonial period and have been transmitted through the Philippine history books (Angeles, 2010: 35).

Though discourse produces and transmits power, it also is the starting point by which resistance is made (Foucault, 1978: 101). In other words, resistance also exists where power is present. For this reason, it cannot be said that only the state or specific groups can continue to hold power and control discourse. Individuals or groups that were repressed by the discourse in the society can form their counter-discourse. As an example, the Muslims of the Philippines has remade themselves by redefining the term 'Moro.' For

them, 'Moro' signifies as dauntless and free people who fought against the foreign oppressors (Angeles, 2010: 50). With this, not only did they reverse the colonial representations about them, but they also emphasized their rich history and culture, and their sovereignty before the colonization. As follows, Muslim resistance has been recognized by the names of their groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Besides them, many contemporary Muslims in the Philippines have called themselves and their organizations as 'Moro' (Angeles, 2010: 46).

This discursive practice permeates every day in the society. It does not solely manifest within the boundary of the state as part of the identity and cultural debate, but discourse also undertakes an important role in foreign policy. According to Ali Balci (2017: 37), foreign policy engages in the production of hegemonic identity and the maintenance of the current power relations through discourse. In other words, foreign policy is primarily the construction of identity and maintaining positions. This means that the state, having no pre-given identity, has to retroactively constitute the basis of its identity and power. That is why the goal of foreign policymakers is to construct policies which embody the state identity. The two must be made consistent with each other (Hansen, 2006: 25).

Although it is necessary to create a stable link between the identity and policy, it is difficult to achieve because of the impossibility to affix a permanent identity/meaning. To put it in other words, within the state there is always an internal inconsistency. That is because the specific articulation of identity and policy is always criticized by whom it rejects. For this reason, foreign policymakers undertake the role of securing the constructed identity by employing the discourse of danger. This is done on two levels. The first level of exclusion locates the threat within the state (Campbell, 1992: 71). As the state considers itself as the 'inside', it relegates the dissidents which are operating within the state as the 'outside.' Nevertheless, this action continues to reflect the state as a site of ambiguity and incongruity (Campbell, 1992: 70). Thus, there is a need to activate the second exclusion in order to hide the disunity in the internal domain and represent the hegemonic self as natural (Campbell, 1992; Balci, 2017). The second exclusion is located outside the state or the 'anarchic realm'. In this exclusion, the state determines a threat in the anarchic realm and connect this threat with the danger found inside the state. In other words, the exclusion of the threat found outside the state is at the same time the exclusion of the threat found within the state. This further accentuates the boundary between the

‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ – the sovereign and the anarchy. For this reason, it can be said the foreign policy is a political performance which constructs boundaries (Ashley, 1987: 51).

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the state does not ultimately hold the power. That is because, according to Foucault, power is ever-present in any place (Foucault, 1978: 93). It does not emanate from a central point where different actors struggle to possess it, but it is produced and exercised by anyone. That is to say, the state cannot fully control all counter-hegemonic groups since they can also access some apparatus of power (Heller, 1996: 101). For this reason, the unnatural constitution of any discourse allows it to be reversibly used by the dissident groups as their instrument (Heller, 1996: 101). This follows that the state is not the only one which can practice foreign policy. Dissident groups can as well employ foreign policy.

By engaging in foreign policy, dissident groups produce alternate representations of themselves to counter that which is imposed upon them by the hegemonic state. Like the state, the dissident groups also used foreign policy to legitimize their identity and protect itself from the state repression. They do this by exposing the narrative of the hegemonic state as mere fabrication. In relation, the dissident groups delegitimize the state by revealing that its policies are only beneficial to selected individuals or groups. Thereby, the dissident groups depict the state as an illegitimate representative of the people, who are forced to be part of it. Moreover, the dissident groups dismantle and transform the boundaries created by the hegemonic state (Balci, 2017: 45) which result to the changes in who is represented as the ‘self/inside’ and the ‘other/outside’.

For instance, Nur Misuari described the struggle of the Moro people as a “reflection” and a “product of a colonial order” (Majul, 1985: 67). In other words, the problem of the Moro people was connected to the problem of the other colonized nations in other parts of the world. That is, like in other nations, American imperialism was considered by the Moro as a threat to their existence. Accordingly, Misuari described America as a “black scourge” which encroached a large portion of the world, including the Moro national homeland. The Americans’ main intention was to “plunder and spread Western civilization” (as cited in Stern, 2012: 16). From here, the MNLF stated that the Philippine state has continued the colonial designs of the Americans. This means that the Philippine state has succeeded

the Americans in colonizing the Moro people. Through this, the MNLF delegitimized the Philippine state in the eyes of other nations. If the Filipino leaders are mere puppets of the imperialist power, then they are not the real representative of the people. Furthermore, the MNLF could appeal to the other nations all over the world, most especially the Islamic countries, to assist them in their fight for independence.

In short, Poststructuralism theory posits that different actors in a society engage in a struggle for position. That is because an unasserted existence is eventually suppressed or marginalized by others. For this reason, dissident groups, which are repressed by the state, produce counter-hegemonic discourse to delegitimize the claim of the state over them. This means that dissident groups create alternative realities which uphold their existence. In maintaining their existence, the dissident groups must employ the repeated assertion of their “self”. That is, dissident groups must continue to emphasize the perception of themselves in contrast to their difference with others. Thereby, the “other” becomes the basis for the constitution of their identity and their continued existence. Nevertheless, the “other” must be excluded as it is also the reason why the “self” is in danger. The exclusion of the “other” from the domain of the “self” is more compelling through the practice of Foreign Policy. This means that dissident groups include in their discourse foreign states to use them as a reference point in countering state authority over them. With this, the dissident groups create a closed community for themselves and put those who disrupt this community outside of their boundary. Thus, by continuously emphasizing the “self”, differentiating it from the “others” and then, placing the “others” at the margins through the practice of foreign policy, the dissident groups consolidate their power over their subjects.

CHAPTER 2: THE PHILIPPINE-MORO CONFLICT

According to some historians, the Philippine-Moro conflict has its beginning during the colonial period. They stated that because the Spanish and American colonizers had privileged the Christian natives and marginalized the non-Christians, they had divided the Philippine inhabitants into two distinct groups. This narrative is supported by the contemporary Moro nationalist movements such as the MNLF. That is, the group used this certain depiction of Philippine-Moro history to show that the Muslims are culturally distinct from the Filipinos and to justify their fight for independence. For this reason, this chapter provides a brief history of the Moro people starting from the Spanish colonial period. Moreover, this chapter discusses the early formation of the Moro and the counter-formation of the Filipinos. Lastly, this chapter also presents the events and elements which led to the rise of the contemporary Moro nationalist movements.

2.1. The Muslims during the Spanish and American Colonial Period

Long before the Spaniards came to the Philippines in 1521, the indigenous people of the Southern island called Mindanao had already adopted Islam. In Mindanao, the people had already established a form of government patterned after the Arabian caliphate. They were called sultanates and they existed alongside each other (Saleeby, 1905: 55). Besides this, the coming of Islam also changed the social and cultural traditions of the people. For instance, Arabic terms were infused in their ethnic languages, and Islamic art forms and literature were embraced and modified by the people (Majul, 2010: 51). Nevertheless, some scholars cautioned that the adoption of Islam on the island was not uniform. This means that not all the natives accepted Islam. Some of them refused to be converted and stayed in the highlands (Saleeby, 1905: 56). Furthermore, this means that the practice of Islamic customs was not exactly the same from where it originally came from. That is, the indigenous people practiced Islam alongside their earlier traditions and native practices.

When the Spaniards began establishing the Philippines as their colony in 1565, their aim was to expand the imperial domain of Spain and Christianized the natives. Despite some resistance from the indigenous people, they were successful in subjugating the central (Visayas) and Northern (Luzon) part of the country. This obstructed the upward spread of Islam from Mindanao (Majul, 2010: 52). Conversely, this ensured that Christianity is

instilled in the inhabitants of the Central and Northern parts. Besides religion, Spain brought with them their own cultural traditions and political institutions. Gradually, these were integrated into the daily lives of the people and later, the natives became accustomed to them. Thereby, just as the Islamic culture was entrenched in the south, the Spanish culture flourished in the Northern and Central islands. For this reason, the people in the Spanish-held areas became culturally and religiously distinct from the people in the south.

The Spaniards tried conquering and converting the people of the Southern islands as well. They were able to gain some small foothold in Mindanao, especially near the coastal areas. Nevertheless, they were constantly met with fierce resistance from the Muslims. This led to a three-century war between them. Throughout the years, the Spaniards employed various strategies to subjugate the Muslims. First, they employed the 'divide-and-rule' tactic (Hernandez, 2017: 17), wherein the Spaniards incited the Christianized natives to hate the Muslim by always depicting them as villains (Majul, 2010: 54). With this, the Spanish were able to use the Christianized natives to attack the Muslim areas. Fighting together, they were able to bring great damage to the Muslim population and their settlement. Second, the Spaniards destroyed the Muslims plantations and fields (Makol-Abdul, 1997: 315), and wrecked many of their boats which crippled their maritime trade and isolated them from other nations including their neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia (Majul, 2010: 53). Meanwhile, the Muslims retaliated by attacking Spanish-held areas, capturing prisoners, and disrupting Christian missionaries (Angeles, 2010: 34). In the end, however, the Spaniards were not able to conquer the whole of Mindanao and many people there remained as followers of Islam. Nevertheless, it must also be noted that some of the Sultans and lesser Muslim leaders submitted to the sovereignty of Spain and accepted its protection (Saleeby, 1905: 60).

The war between the Spaniards and the Muslims brought about several consequences. First, it led the people of the south to become more underdeveloped (Majul, 2010: 53). Second, the intolerant attitude of the Spaniards towards the unconverted people, especially the Muslims, drove a wedge between the different communities which were once related by the racial, linguistic and cultural ties before they were introduced to Islam and Christianity (Majul, 2010: 54). Accordingly, the Filipino-Christians inherited the negative images created by the Spaniards on the Muslims. Meanwhile, the Muslims also viewed the Filipino-Christians as bigots and 'land-grabbers' (Makol-Abdul, 1997: 315).

Finally, this wariness against each other continued during and after the American colonial period and thus affected the relationship between the Filipino-Christians and Muslims.

When the Spaniards were defeated by the Americans in 1898, the Philippines was turned over to the Americans as a prize for winning the war. The whole Philippine islands, including Mindanao and Sulu, were put under the American administration. The coming of the Americans led to another revolution by the Filipinos in the north. Unfortunately, due to the superior military capabilities of the Americans, they were not able to win against them. To quiet the Filipinos' voice of dissent and to make them cooperate with the Americans, the policy of 'benevolent assimilation' was pursued by the new colonizers. This means that the Filipino-Christians were to be gradually indoctrinated into the western culture and principles. Also, this means that the people were allowed to take part in the administration of the country by participating in the legislative body set up by the Americans (Hernandez, 2017: 22).

Meanwhile, the first occupation of Americans in Mindanao was described as a military control but with a policy of non-interference. Unlike the Spaniards, the Americans did not use force to win the Muslims (Byler, 2005: 41). That is because they wanted to avoid any spark of resistance, especially when there were not enough soldiers to fight against the Muslims. Most of the American soldiers were stationed in the Northern parts of the country because the fighting between the Filipino-Christians and the Americans was raging during this period (Kho, n.d.). Instead, the Americans pursued diplomacy in order to gain the trust of the Muslims. Accordingly, the Americans did not forcibly convert the Muslims to Christianity (Angeles, 2010: 38). Moreover, an agreement* was signed between the Americans and the Sultan of Sulu. This treaty stipulated that the Americans would uphold the Sultanate autonomy and not give nor sell the Sultanate territories to other nation. In addition, the Americans would give the Sultan and the tribal chiefs some money as payment for raising the American flag and permitting them to occupy some areas on the islands (Kho, n.d.). Finally, the treaty prevented the Americans from interfering in the local customs and practice even though they deemed them as 'uncivilized' (Gowing, 1968: 374).

* Bates Treaty was signed in August 1899 which was unilaterally invalidated by the Americans in 1905.

Years later, the Americans became dissatisfied with the non-interference policy because it prevented them from eliminating the ‘uncivilized’ customs of the people. For this reason, the American soldiers who were stationed in the south clamored to change this directive (Byler, 2005: 41). Subsequently, any non-interference agreement made by the Americans with the Muslims were unilaterally abrogated to exercise direct control of Muslim affairs. This led to the creation of local governments headed by American military and civilian officials. Accordingly, the Americans also appointed some Muslim leaders to govern the people on their behalf but made their power limited. In addition, the Americans instituted new laws such as the abolition of the practice of slavery and the compulsory tax payment on Muslim properties and their economic activities (Gowing, 1968: 377). Besides the alterations in the political and social structure, there were other changes that were actually beneficial to the Muslims. These were the construction of roads, schools, and healthcare centers. There was also growth in the agriculture and commerce sector in which the Muslims were asked to actively participate (Gowing, 1968: 376). Although some of the Muslims welcomed the changes and cooperated with the Americans, others felt that the Americans were becoming more intrusive in their daily lives. That is why, some of them revolted against the American rule, but they were later subdued by the more advanced military capabilities of the Americans (Byler, 2005: 43).

The Americans also tried to integrate the Muslims into the mainstream Filipino culture (Caballero-Anthony, 2007: 147). As a result, some Muslim leaders collaborated with the American colonial government and were able to gain and maintain their power over their people (McKenna, 1998: 88). However, the integration policy of the Americans also aggravated the divide between the rest of the Moros and the Christianized Filipinos. For instance, the Americans categorize the population between Christian and non-Christian tribes and oftentimes used the term ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ to describe them (Hernandez, 2017: 25). In addition, the mandatory public education of the Americans inevitably led to the gradual disappearance of the local indigenous culture. Finally, the Americans encouraged the mass migration of Filipino-Christians to Mindanao. The aim was primarily to expose the Muslim farmers to the techniques employed by the farmers in the North. However, there was bias distribution of land property wherein Filipino-Christians get to have an immense tract of land while the Moros get to have less (Hernandez, 2017: 27). Consequently, this led to the dislocation of the Muslims in their own lands. This deprivation of their lands and the domination of Christian bureaucrats in

their midst heightened the Moros resentment against the Filipino-Christians. Eventually, these policies had led to intermittent fighting between the Muslim people and the combined force of American and Filipino troops, which led to the death of hundreds of Muslims (Byler, 2005: 43).

When the Americans allowed the Filipino leaders in the Northern regions to handle the country's internal affairs, the Filipino officials assumed the task of governing the Muslim territories too (Gowing, 1968: 379). The decision of the Americans, however, was rejected by the Muslims. They sent several petition letters to the American Congress which stipulated their request to be given their autonomy or independence. Some of the Americans like New York Congressman, Robert Bacon, responded in support of the Muslims. He filed a bill in which he proposed the exclusion of the Mindanao and Palawan from the Philippines (Magdalena, 2017: 15). However, the American government did not answer positively to their petitions. In order to abate their opposition, the Philippine Commonwealth government provided many opportunities to the Muslims, including more access to education, health, and public programs. More importantly, they were given a part in the local governments and later in the Philippine legislature (Gowing, 1968: 380). As a response, some traditional Muslims leaders and elites opted to cooperate with the Philippine Commonwealth government. This decision was made in order to preserve their power over their subjects and to protect their material interests (Caballero-Anthony, 2007: 147). In the end, the island of Mindanao and its Muslim inhabitants were made officially part of the Philippine state after the Americans declared the Philippine independence on July 4, 1946.

2.2. The early formation of Moros and the counter-formation of Filipinos

Certain historians and the Moro nationalist groups argued that the Moros have already identified themselves as different people from the Filipinos even before the Philippine state was established. According to them, this is attested by the declarations made by the Muslim leaders which petitioned for the exclusion of the Moros from the planned formation of the Philippine state. The first declaration was made on the 9th of June 1921 wherein the people of Sulu sent a letter to the American Congress. In their letter, they requested that the Sulu archipelago shall not be included in the Philippine State if ever it was formed. The second declaration was made on the 1st of February 1924 in Zamboanga which petitioned for the autonomy of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Finally, on the 18th

of March 1935, the leaders in Lanao once again appealed to the American government not to include the Muslim territories to the Philippine state if an independent state was to be granted to the Filipino-Christians (Lingga, 2010: 30).

Accordingly, in the first declaration, the people of Sulu voiced their opposition against the planned inclusion of their territories to the Philippine state. They had several reasons for this. First, they did not want to be governed by different people because this would jeopardize their identity and religion. Since the Filipinos did not have enough knowledge about their religion and practices, the Muslims leaders claimed that the Filipinos were unable to create laws which ensure the respect and protection of their faith and traditions. With this, they pointed out the status of their marriage and their children* as a specific example of the Philippine government's failure to recognize their religion. Second, they argued that the Philippine legislature did not make laws that addressed the needs and welfare of the Moros. For instance, they claimed that the legislature members did not appropriate properly the funds meant for their people. These funds were supposed to be used for the construction and maintenance of their roads, buildings, and schools, but the Filipinos used them for their own purposes instead. Finally, they argued that the Philippine government failed to preserve law and order. That is, the Filipinos, specifically the Philippine Constabulary, had committed several cases of violence to the Muslims. This included the stealing of their property, harassing their people, and detaining them without any trials. With this, they opted to be under American colonial rule rather than to be part of the Philippine government (Tuazon, 2008: 185).

Years after, another declaration was created. Similar to the first, the "Declaration of Rights and Purposes" in 1924 also proposed that the Moro people and its territories be separated from that of the Filipinos. The Muslim leaders also reiterated the same reasons as the first declaration. First, they complained about the lack of their real representative in the legislative. This is because their representative was mainly appointed by the Governor-General and approved by the Senate controlled by the Filipinos. For them, they should have a choice in selecting who their representative should be. Second, they also complained about the harassment of their people, including women and children. According to them, their people had been killed randomly by the Philippine Constabulary

* The Muslim leaders asserted that having more than one wife is acceptable in Islam. However, the Philippine laws deemed it illegal and consequently, their concubines and any children with them were deemed illegitimate.

and any investigations made were not conducted accordingly. Finally, they lamented that they were not able to exercise their freedom of speech and religion. Being treated differently, they stated that they were not able to enjoy fully their rights and they felt that they were being dominated by the Filipino-Christians. For these reasons, they requested the American colonial government to incorporate them in the American territory or give them independence, including from the Filipinos. If their request would not be granted, they proclaimed that it would be much better for them to die than to be subjugated by the ruling Filipino-Christians (Jubair, 1999: 298).

Finally, the “Dansalan Declaration of 1935” was made at the height of the formulation of the 1935 Philippine Constitution, which was a preparation for the establishment of an independent Philippine state. In this declaration, they reiterated that they did not want the Muslim territories to be included in the Philippine state. They justified that the Philippines was inhabited by two different people, practicing different religion and traditions. Accordingly, they indicated that the Muslims were predominant in Mindanao and Sulu islands. Meanwhile, the Filipino-Christians inhabited the islands of Luzon and Visayas. Because of their differences, the Moros claimed that the Filipinos have marginalized them ever since they were put under one administration. As proof, they indicated that the Christian areas were much more modernized while the Muslim territories were still underdeveloped. They claimed that this was due to their allotted funds being withheld by the Filipinos. Also, they stated that the Filipinos had no regard for them which was demonstrated by the lack of provisions for the Moro people in the constitution. With this, they believed that the Moros and Filipinos could not live together because they had always been antagonistic to each other (Dela Cruz, 2013).

The relevance of these declarations is in the fact that it highlighted the importance of their faith and culture as the reason for their petitions. According to them, their institutions, their laws, and traditions are incidental to their faith. This means that the laws and institutions established by the Filipinos would eventually destabilize theirs. With the curtailment of their practices and beliefs, they also believed that it would lead to the loss of their identity. As specified in the Dansalan Declaration, the Muslim leaders stated that without their religion, it would be impossible to continue living their lives (Dela Cruz, 2013). In other words, the difference in religion between the Moros and the Filipinos was perceived by the Moros as the element which separated them from each other. They

reinforced this by referring to themselves as Moros or Mohammedan, while they called the northern inhabitants as Christian Filipinos. Moreover, they underscored that Mindanao and Sulu have been historically the land of their people and these lands have retained its sovereignty even during the Spanish subjugation of the rest of the country.

Meanwhile, the Filipino leaders responded to the separation request of the Moros. Firstly, they questioned the authenticity of the documents. According to them, the Moro leaders could not have written such documents because English fluency among them was quite rare. Moreover, since the Muslim leaders imprinted their thumb marks on the document instead of actually signing it, they presumed that the Muslims were unable to read and write. Therefore, they argued that the petitions were obviously written by the Americans and not by the Moros. Nevertheless, it remains to be known whether the Muslim leaders were properly informed regarding the contents of the documents (Stevens, 2011: 91). Second, they asserted that despite religious differences the Filipinos and Moros were of the same race. As written by Jose P. Melencio, director of the United States Philippine Press Bureau, the Philippines was inhabited by racially homogenous people. With this, he pointed out that people from Luzon to Mindanao have similar physical features, similar way of living, and the same customs (Melencio, 1919: 15). Finally, they contended that there was no antagonism between the Filipinos and the Moros. As Melencio wrote, he justified that there was no difference among the various indigenous tribes in the Philippines. He proved this by saying that there were people from different 'tribes' who were working together in the Philippine national legislature (Melencio, 1919: 16). He also quoted a Muslim member of the legislature who asserted that it was not impossible for Muslims and Filipinos to live in harmony and cooperate with each other (Melencio, 1919: 11).

Accordingly, the Muslims and their territories were incorporated in the Philippine state in 1946. To expedite the integration of the Muslims into the Philippine society, the government continued the land settlement policies instituted by the American government. Starting from the Philippine Commonwealth Government in 1935, legislative acts were enacted to open settlement projects in Mindanao. After which, a multitude of northern inhabitants immigrated to the island. The government, however, prioritized the submission of paperwork than the occupancy of the land (Aquino, 2009: 44). While some Muslim elites understood the new regulations and were able to take the necessary

documents to legalize their lands, the other Muslims were unable to do so due to various reasons (Curaming, 2016: 127).

Besides this, the Filipino leaders promulgated the Republic Act No. 1888 which enacted the creation of the Commission on National Integration (CNI) in 1957. The duty of this special office was to expedite the integration of the non-Christian Filipinos through economic, social, and political means. With this, CNI launched programs and services which include power plant construction, irrigation projects, loans, and scholarship programs. The most notable projects they initiated was the university scholarship for young Muslims and indigenous people. The aim of which was to give mainstream educations to the non-Christians. Through this, the Philippine government expected that the students would return to their respective areas and spread the Filipino culture (Eder & McKenna, 2008: 61).

Accordingly, some of the Muslim elites had opted to cooperate with the Philippine government. Many of them benefited from the American colonial government and they expected that they would be able to maintain or improve their status in the Filipino-dominated system. With their acceptance of the Philippine government, they were the first ones to be called the Filipino-Muslims (Caballero-Anthony, 2007: 148).

2.3. The Beginning of the Moro nationalist movement in the 1970s

Though the integration programs of the Philippine government did indeed assimilate the Muslims into the Filipino society, these also had reverse consequence. This consequence was the dislocation of the Filipino-Muslim identity. This means that the younger generation of Muslims had experienced contradictions in the internalization of this identity. Accordingly, the first dislocation was the land settlement policy. Besides the fact that it changed the demography of Muslim Mindanao (McKenna, 1998: 116) and displaced the Muslims from their ancestral homeland (Engineer, 1985: 2113), it also alienated the younger Muslims from their traditional Muslim elites. The second dislocation was the scholarship programs offered to the young Muslim scholars (McKenna, 1998: 140). This opportunity has introduced the young Muslims to emancipatory ideologies like nationalism, anti-colonialism, and socialism. More importantly, this opportunity allowed them to live in Christian-dominated communities and made them experience first-hand the rejection of their Filipino-Christian peers.

Firstly, the resettlement policy of the Philippine government in the 1950s and 1960s had led to more immigrants in the Mindanao. This was compounded by the government's declaration that all lands without title shall be considered as public properties (Majul, 1988: 900). With this, the Muslim people, having no awareness or no money to pay the entitlement process, were involuntarily robbed out of their lands. These lands were later transferred to Christian settlers. Accordingly, the Muslim leaders assisted in the facilitation of this settlement projects. In return, they were given national patronage for not interfering in the mass settlement of Filipinos from the north (Vartavarian, 2018: 10). For instance, Datu Salipada Pendatun was a prominent Muslim politician but was disconnected from the Muslims in his areas. He was closer to the Filipino-Christian social and political circles than he was with the traditional Muslims leaders (McKenna, 1998: 127). It was also said that he willingly divided his territory (Vartavarian, 2018: 10) when he introduced a bill in Congress which pushed to make Cotabato into two provinces (McKenna, 1998: 127). This resulted in the creation of North Cotabato which is now inhabited mostly by Muslims. Meanwhile, most of the inhabitants of South Cotabato are now Christians. Besides him, there was also Datu Udtug Matalam who had been the Governor of Cotabato. Although he was much closer to his subjects than Datu Pendatun was with his subjects, the shift of demography and the threat of losing power prompted Datu Matalam to relinquish a large part of his territory to Christian settlers to preserve his authority (McKenna, 1998: 137).

As consequence, this resettlement policy displaced many Muslims from their own lands. This pushed them into poverty since they relied on their lands for food and livelihood. More importantly, the displacement of Muslims disconnected them from their leaders whom they regarded as people who should have assisted them in improving their social and economic status (Majul, 1988: 902). This was quite evident when an investigation regarding the economic disparities between the Muslims and Christians in Mindanao was ordered by the government. The investigation committee led by a well-known Muslim politician tackled the issue by downgrading the problem. Instead of linking poverty to the immigration of Christians to their lands, the committee's report placed the responsibility on the Muslim culture which caused the backwardness of the areas (McKenna, 1998: 139). Because of the inaction of the Muslim leaders, the Muslim nationalists charged them as perpetrators, alongside with their Christian counterparts, in exploiting and oppressing the Muslims (Majul, 1988: 902).

In addition, the integration agenda of the government which offered young Muslims scholarships to study in urban cities like Manila had led to the dislocation of the Filipino-Muslim identity. Although political manipulation ensured that children of *datus* would be able to receive the scholarship, there were also non-elite Muslims who were able to take the same opportunity (Eder & McKenna, 2008: 61). These Muslim scholars with non-elite backgrounds would constitute the new western educated elites in their communities (McKenna, 1998: 140). During their studies, they were exposed to many Western and Eastern ideologies which eventually shaped how they viewed the political occurrences in the Philippines and in other countries. Moreover, this experience exposed them to the modernization and urbanization that was occurring in the major cities and made them aware of the isolation and impoverishment of their own communities (Majul, 1988: 900). Besides this, they encountered the antagonistic behavior and prejudices of the Christians towards the Muslims, which made them realize the contradictions in the integration policy of the Philippine government. This realization was galvanized when the news regarding the killing of young Muslim army recruits erupted in 1968. Accordingly, the massacre of the young Muslims in 1968 was interpreted by these Muslim scholars as a betrayal of the same government that purported to assimilate them (McKenna, 1998: 143). They believed that despite their efforts in contributing to the development of the country as Filipino-Muslims, they were still rejected by the Filipino-Christians.

In conclusion, the incorporation of the Muslims into the Philippine state had brought about the dislocation of the Muslims, not only physically, but also culturally and politically. Consequently, it disconnected them from their Filipino-Muslim identity. This dislocation was prompted with the compliance of the Muslim leaders who pushed them to view themselves as part of the Philippine nation. This entailed the acceptance of Filipino-Christian culture and traditions as part of their development and modernization. In return, however, their Muslim leaders neglected them and exposed them to the exploitation of Filipino-Christian leaders. Meanwhile, their attempt to integrate themselves in Filipino society and take on the identity of being Filipino-Muslim were constantly being rebuffed by the Filipino-Christians. These conditions gave an opening for the MNLF to fill the void and create a new identity to which these marginalized people can attach themselves. The purpose of this identity was to disconnect them from the Philippine state and their traditional Muslim leaders.

When the controversial Jabidah massacre (also known as Corregidor Affair) erupted in 1968, it provided the soon-to-be leaders of the MNLF a starting point on which to base their retroactive construction of their identity and the formation of their imagined national homeland. This event also became the foundation of MNLF's discourse against the Philippine government and the traditional Muslim leaders. More importantly, it created an important link between the MNLF and Malaysia as one of the group's supporters in the early years of their secessionist movement.



CHAPTER 3: MNLF AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION OF MALAYSIA

The MNLF led by Nur Misuari is one of the Muslim insurgent groups which were against the Philippine state since the 1970s. The group's aim was to achieve independence from the Philippines and create a Moro state – the Bangsamoro Republik. In the early days of the MNLF's struggle, Malaysia secretly supported the group against the Philippine state by providing weapons and ammunition. Moreover, the Malaysian government trained the Moro fighters for guerrilla warfare. Conversely, the MNLF acknowledged the Malaysians as their brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, this good relation between Malaysia and the MNLF eventually changed in 2001. Starting this period, the MNLF depicted Malaysia in its discourse as a colonizer that cooperates with the Philippine state against the Moro people.

Chapter Three mainly explores how the MNLF has used Malaysia as its reference point in re-establishing itself as the legitimate Moro representative. It shows how the MNLF has reconstructed Malaysia, from being its friend to becoming an enemy of the Moro people. With this, it discusses the events and processes which led the MNLF to represent Malaysia as a colonizer of the Moro land, co-conspirator of the Philippine government and being a un-Islamic state. More importantly, this chapter explains how these representations of Malaysia reinforced the re-legitimization of the MNLF's authority over the Moro people after it was threatened by the rise of its rival group – the MILF.

However, before discussing the new discourse of MNLF on Malaysia, this chapter first present their early relation, and the changes in the power dynamics within the Philippines starting from 2001. Through this, the transformation of the relationship between the MNLF and Malaysia can be shown clearly. Subsequently, the previous and the new discourse of the MNLF on Malaysia can be compared distinctly. Finally, the events which displaced the MNLF as the only representative of the Moro people and incited them to recreate Malaysia in their discourse can be presented systematically and used as evidence to support the thesis argument.

3.1. Relation of MNLF and Malaysia in the early days of the movement

In March 1968, news erupted about the massacre of young Muslim men in the Philippines. These young men were recruited from Sulu and were trained for months by the Philippine army in Corregidor Island. For some reasons, the men have mutinied against their officers and were later killed. During the investigation, Jibin Arula, who claimed to be the only survivor, disclosed that they were trained for a secret Philippine government project called Operation Merdeka. According to him, he and his colleagues were trained to infiltrate Sabah, wherein they would cut off the communication lines and blow off the airfields. The aim of this infiltration was to reclaim Sabah back for the Philippines (“Still no reply”, 1968). On the other hand, the government refuted his statements. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said that it was not the government that wanted to infiltrate Sabah but it was the Filipino-Muslims who wanted to seize it. This statement was echoed by the Philippine Defense Department. It justified that the purpose of the recruitment and training was to incorporate the young Muslim men in the army and prevent them from seizing Sabah (“Marcos 'ready to act'", 1968).

The news regarding the operation was controversial not only within the Philippines but also in the neighboring countries. It stirred their interest because it brought back into the surface a critical diplomatic issue between the Philippines and Malaysia which ultimately revolved around Sabah. Accordingly, Sabah, now a territory of Malaysia, was once part of the Sulu Sultanate. When the Sultan of Sulu died in 1936, the Philippine Commonwealth government led by President Manuel Quezon abolished the Sulu Sultanate. This signified that the sovereign power rested upon the Philippine state. Nevertheless, the Philippine government maintained that the heirs of the Sultan would remain as the religious head of the people. However, during World War II, the British military army took control of Sabah and declared it as a British crown colony (Fernandez, 2013: 45). Several years later, Britain gave Malaysia its independence in the early 1960s. This was followed by Sabah getting its freedom from Britain. It was later incorporated to the Federation of Malaysia. This incorporation of Sabah to Malaysia was opposed by the Philippines state. Accordingly, Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal contended that Sabah was rightfully part of the Philippines (“Manila was told”, 1962). However, this claim was repeatedly rejected by the Malaysian government. Subsequently, the two states

were locked in a diplomatic issue. For years, both states tried to resolve the conflict but the case remained unclosed.

The disclosure of the Jabidah Massacre and Operation Merdeka re-opened the long-standing issue between the Philippines and Malaysia. Top Malaysian officials and the Malaysian public released several statements against the Philippines. One statement came from Inche Harris bin Mohamed Salleh, the president of the largest youth organization in Sabah. According to him, the incident marked the dubious intention of the Philippines whom they thought was a friend of the Malaysian state. Moreover, he and his colleagues ascertained that any attempt to invade Sabah would be met with resistance from the youth ("Pledge by youth", 1968). Besides Salleh, Tun Mustapha, who was the Chief Minister of Sabah, expounded on this hostile intention of the Philippines. According to him, the Philippines had repeatedly deceived Malaysia. The first instance of Philippine's deception was when it posed as a friend of Kuala Lumpur after its confrontation with Indonesia. During the rift between Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines sided with the latter instead of the former. The second deception committed by the Philippine state, according to Tun Mustapha, was its incessant claim to Sabah. Tun Mustapha explained that the Philippine government promised to dismiss its claim on Sabah after signing an anti-smuggling agreement with Malaysia (Ramalingam, 1968a). The Corregidor incident, however, showed that the Philippines still had the interest in acquiring Sabah from Malaysia. With this, Tun Mustapha promised not to surrender the Malaysian territory to the Philippines, and he reiterated that Sabah had chosen to remain with Malaysia (Ramalingam, 1968b). Because of this issue, Kuala Lumpur suspended its diplomatic relations with the Philippines after it passed a bill which supposedly annexed Sabah (Loong, 1968).

Within the Philippines, Muslims from different sectors also reacted against the government after hearing the Jabidah Massacre. For instance, Muslim religious leaders asserted that the massacre was part of the religious persecutions and demanded the Muslims politicians to take immediate actions (Majul, 1988: 902). The Filipino-Muslim students also protested in front of the Presidential palace and condemned the massacre and the intention of the Philippines to invade Sabah. They declared that the incident would lead to the division of the people in the Philippines ("Muslims march", 1968). This was re-echoed by Rashid Lucman, a Muslim congressman. He charged President Marcos of

scheming not only against the Malaysians but also seeking to create anarchy among the Muslims of Mindanao and Sulu (as cited in Fernandez, 2013: 51). More importantly, Nur Misuari, who became the chairman of the MNLF, used the incident to protest against the government. He used the Corregidor incident as an important political symbol for their nationalist movement. Specifically, he interpreted the event as the pinnacle of a series of killings committed against the Muslims from the Spanish colonial period to the present Philippine government. This narrative effectively perpetuated the historic victimhood of the Muslims in the Philippines, which at that point, triggered the Muslims to declare themselves a different nation and secede from the Philippine state (Aljunied & Curaming, 2012: 230).

From here on, the Jabidah massacre would later be retold by the Muslim leaders as a story of the valiant stand of the young Muslim men against their superiors. In other words, they were killed because they allegedly refused to carry out their mission to infiltrate Sabah and kill their fellow Muslims (Aljunied & Curaming, 2012: 233). Moreover, the MNLF leaders would conceptualize the Moro people as innately distinct from the Filipinos and more related to other Muslims nations, especially those in Malaysia and Indonesia (Gross, 2007: 183). For this reason, Nur Misuari explained in his 1975 policy paper that the success of Operation Merdeka would have not only perpetuated Filipino colonialism. It would have also caused distrust between the Moro people and their Muslim brothers, which would have led to the isolation of the Moros from the larger Islamic world (as cited in Stern, 2012: 39). With this, the MNLF constructed the Moro identity as one and part of the Islamic nations. In relation, they invoked that their fight for independence was part of the Islamic struggle against the encroaching Western civilization. Consequently, this appealed the sympathy of Malaysia and other Muslim countries and prompted them to support the MNLF in its fight for the Moro's independence.

On the other side, the Malaysians reciprocated the same perception. As what one of the Malaysian Foreign Ministers recalled, the Malaysians felt that the Moro people were part of them and this feeling was their main motivation to ensure the security and welfare of the Moros in Mindanao (as cited in Zha, 2017: 6). This feeling of affinity was said to have led the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, to raise the issue of the Moros to the members of the OIC in 1972 (Zha, 2017: 7). Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, would repeat the same appeal to the Islamic nations during his speech

at the Islamic Summit Conference held in 1974 in Pakistan. He stated that in the context of upholding the Islamic unity and cooperation, the plight of the Muslims in the Philippines was a great concern for all delegates present in the conference. He believed that it was their task to work out a solution with the Philippine government to end the tragic situation of the Muslims in the country. He ended his speech with, “We seek to give our Muslim brothers a rightful place in a peaceful world” (Tun Abdul Razak, 1974).

Nevertheless, during the heat of the insurgency, both the MNLF and the Malaysian government were careful in ensuing statements that would expose clearly their connections. Yet, it was widely speculated by the Philippine officials that the Malaysian government was supporting the Moro insurgents in the 1970s. The Philippine government claimed that Moro men were trained in a guerilla fight in different areas in Malaysia, including Sabah. Moreover, they were accused of providing weapons to the Moro rebels. Besides weapons, Sabah’s Chief Minister, Tun Mustapha, had reportedly provided financial funds to the insurgents (“Jolo rebels”, 1974). Nevertheless, the Malaysian government consistently denied that they had given any support to the Moros. This was probably because they did not want to provoke more aggression from the Philippine government.

3.2. Changes in the domestic power dynamic and Malaysia’s new role

Since the 1970s, the MNLF fighters waged war against the Philippine army. It was the main organization fighting for the independence of the Moro people against the Philippine government. In fact, the OIC declared it as the only representative of the Moro people in 1974 and gave it an observer status, which was denied to the Philippine government. On the other hand, the MILF, whose members broke away from the MNLF in 1977, was not recognized by the OIC nor by the Malaysian government. For this reason, the Philippine government dealt mainly with the MNLF in the 1970s to the late 1990s. Accordingly, the MNLF and the Philippine government, under different Philippine presidents, signed peace agreements through the mediation of the OIC. The first one was the 1976 Tripoli Agreement which provided the autonomy of 13 provinces in Mindanao. Then, there was the Jeddah peace accord in 1987. The last one was the 1996 Jakarta Peace Agreement which enacted the actual administering of ARMM. The leader of the MNLF, Nur Misuari, was instituted as the governor of the region (Hernandez, 2017: 58).

Although the 1996 agreement enacted the autonomy of the Moro people, the MILF continued its fight against the government. According to the first leader of the MILF, Hashim Salamat, the deals signed by the MNLF with the government were traps. He said that the peace deal did not tackle the real issues of the Moros because it did not provide real justice and freedom to the Moro people. It was merely created to seemingly solve the problem of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) (as cited in Buazon, 1999: 264). For him, the only answer to the problems was to give the Moros their full independence and not just autonomy (Salamat, 2000). This was one of the reasons why the MILF felt that the MNLF capitulated to the Philippine government and gave up the Moro's real desire for independence. Moreover, the group accused the MNLF members of assimilating themselves into the Philippine system. Particularly, Salamat (1998) said that the MNLF had already recognized the Philippine constitution and had been working under the Philippine government. This is based on the fact that the MNLF leaders were given positions in the government and their fighters were integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). For these reasons, the MILF distanced itself from the MNLF group and presented itself as the real representative of the Moro demands. Accordingly, Mohagher Iqbal, the MILF chief negotiator, emphasized that the MILF is different from the MNLF. Primarily, he stressed that Islam is very significant in the group's struggle for self-determination, while they complained that the MNLF has more secular orientation. In relation, the MILF proclaimed that unlike the MNLF, it would establish an independent Islamic state (Iqbal, 1998). With this, the MILF encouraged the Moro people to turn back into the fold of Islam and launched a jihad against the usurper of their land (Salamat, 1998).

Meanwhile, the MNLF and the Philippine government ended their battle after successfully signing the Jakarta Peace Agreement in 1996. The MNLF was given control of the autonomous region and the responsibility to uplift the status of the Moros. For years, the MNLF relatively had power over its Moro constituents. This changed in 2001 when the Philippine government under President Arroyo declared the halting of military operations against the MILF (Villanueva M. A., 2001a). Besides this, the Philippine government announced that it would start conducting peace negotiation with the MILF. It requested the Malaysian government to mediate the peace process between the Philippines and the other dissident group (Parameswaran, 2001). To launch this peace process, President Arroyo enacted the Republic Act No. 9054 which sought to expand the

territories under ARMM. This meant that a plebiscite was to be conducted to determine which territories would want to remain or be included in the autonomous region. The creation of this new territories also meant that new officials would have to be elected (Villanueva M. A., 2001b). For this reason, Misuari called out for the suspension of the plebiscite as he deemed it a violation of the peace treaty signed between the MNLF and the Philippine government, and a violation of the OIC resolution (Abuza, 2003: 43). President Arroyo, however, did not heed his statements. The Philippine government continued with the plebiscite. Subsequently, the Filipino leaders also installed into power the breakaway members of the MNLF who tried to unseat Misuari from his position as the chairman of the group* (Gross, 2007: 218).

Hereafter, Nur Misuari and his followers were locked in a discursive battle against the Philippine government. On one side, the government and Misuari's critics accused him of being incompetent. They said that his frequent absence in ARMM led to the failure of the autonomy. This was the reason why they believed that the removal of Misuari was necessary. Park Hussein, who was a former follower of Misuari, stated that the autonomous government led by Misuari was not able to produce satisfactory results and progress to the Moro people (Conde, 2001a). On the other hand, Misuari contended that the government was at fault. Misuari said that the government had not relinquished its treachery and had betrayed the MNLF and the Moro people again (Conde, 2001a). Moreover, he suspected that the government was thinking that the MNLF and its leaders were already a 'spent force' and this was the basis of their provocations against the MNLF. Accordingly, he said that "since the government is not willing to mend its ways and to concede to us even under the best conditions like the peace agreement, we should explore other possible options" (Conde, 2001b).

A few months after the plebiscite, the MNLF staged an uprising, which led the government to strip Misuari of his authority as the governor of ARMM ("Manila strips", 2001). Meanwhile, Misuari fled to Malaysia where he sought a temporary political asylum until he can find another host country (Dacanay, 2001). However, this was rejected by the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad who said that the state would not provide refuge to rebels. The Prime Minister also said that Kuala Lumpur had once assisted the group to obtain autonomy. Nevertheless, Misuari had abused his power

* They were called the Moro National Liberation Front-Executive Council (MNLF-EC).

and had not fulfilled his promise of uplifting the Moro people. For this reason, Mahathir felt that it was no longer necessary for Malaysia to assist Misuari (“Misuari arrested”, 2001). Another Malaysian official also said that Misuari was arrested for security reasons. The Malaysian authorities had reasons to believe that the MNLF had some connections with Abu Sayyaf* (Reuters, 2001). More than a month later, Kuala Lumpur deported back Nur Misuari to the Philippines (Baruah, 2002), where he was imprisoned for more than five years. At this point, the MNLF evidently became hostile to Malaysia. The group has started accusing Malaysia of being an accomplice of the Philippine government in colonizing the Moro people. In addition, the group has begun claiming Sabah as part of the Bangsamoro homeland.

Despite the Philippine officials’ efforts to make a deal with the MILF, the negotiation between the Philippine government under Arroyo administration and the MILF did not come to a successful end. This led to the reignition of hostilities between the government forces and the MILF until 2010. When the term of Arroyo ended, President Benigno Aquino III succeeded her and continued her efforts to bring about peace in Mindanao. He also initiated another peace offer with the MILF in which he also requested Malaysia to be the mediator (“PNoy: Govt-MILF”, 2010). This move pleased the MILF because the group believed that it would make the resumption of the negotiation much easier (“MILF welcomes”, 2010). After two years of discussion, the Philippine government and the MILF signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), which was witnessed by the Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Najib Abdul Razak and other Malaysian delegates. The FAB was a preliminary agreement which set the guidelines for the future discussions between the Philippine state and the MILF. Ultimately, the goal of the two parties was to replace ARMM, which President Aquino III described as a ‘failed experiment’. The two parties wanted to create a new autonomous political entity called Bangsamoro (Macaraig, 2012). Likewise, Mohagher Iqbal concurred with President Aquino III and emphasized that they were aiming a deal better than the treaties signed between the MNLF and the Philippine government. For the MILF, it wanted to pursue a peace agreement that would truly lead to the resolution of the Moro issue (“MILF govt”, 2013). With regards to the role of Malaysia in the peace process, the current chairman of the MILF, Murad Ebrahim, commented that the group was thankful for the support of the Malaysian government and

* It is another Philippine Muslim rebel group who the United States claimed has links with the Al-Qaeda.

their people. He said that the Moro government which he envisioned was inspired by Malaysia's moderate Islamic policy (Ebrahim, 2012).

This new peace agreement between the MILF and the Philippine government was once again opposed by the MNLF. To pacify the MNLF, the government and other foreign bodies tried to unify the two group. However, Misuari rejected this, saying that the MNLF is a separate body from the MILF. Furthermore, the MNLF justified that it is the only Moro group that has been granted permanent observer status by the OIC and therefore, the only legitimate representative of the Moro people (Echeminada, 2012). Regarding the MNLF's rival group, Misuari called its members traitors and criminals. For this reason, he said that he cannot allow the MILF to sign a peace agreement with the Philippine government. He also hoped that the Philippine government would not affiliate with the MILF (Cabal, 2016). Moreover, the MNLF said that it no longer support autonomy. The group proclaimed that it no longer sees autonomy as a viable solution to the Philippine-Moro conflict. Instead, the group stated that the Moro people wished to be separated from the Philippine state and declared the independence of Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan (MINSUPALA) and Sabah (Araullo, 2013). Meanwhile, the MILF also rejected possibilities of reunification with the MNLF because the group believed that it already has a solid organization (Bacongco, 2012). Furthermore, unlike the MNLF, the MILF has now opted for political autonomy rather than full independence. With this difference between the two group, Murad Ebrahim said that the struggle in Mindanao and Sulu* was growing divergent from each other (Ebrahim, 2016).

While criticizing the MILF and the Philippine state, the MNLF also released statements against Malaysia. The group reiterated that Malaysia was conspiring with the Philippine government against the Moros. Accordingly, the MNLF stated that Malaysia's role as a mediator in the MILF-Philippine peace talks was to make sure that the Moro people would not be able to get back their homeland, Sabah. In relation, the group accused Malaysia of using MILF as its pawns to pursue its self-interest. Besides the peace deal, the MNLF also interpreted certain events as examples of Malaysian oppression on the Moros. These include the expulsion of the Moros from Sabah and the alleged massacre of Tausugs during the 2013 Lahad Datu incident.

* It is reported that the MILF's stronghold is in mainland Mindanao while the MNLF's is in Sulu.

With the conditions stated above, it must be pointed out that the changing attitude of MNLF towards the MILF, the Philippine government, and Malaysia was not triggered merely by the rivalry of MNLF and MILF or even the peace deal. This conjecture is based on the relation between the MNLF and MILF before 2001. During this period, Nur Misuari responded to the request of Philippine President Ramos and mediated the peace talks between the MILF and the Philippine government in 1997. He also hoped that the peace talks between the two parties would end well. Specifically, Misuari said, “our firmness in wishing success in the on-going GRP-MILF peace talk is prompted, among others, by our people’s genuine desire to see the enlargement of the dimension of peace in our homeland” (Misuari, 1998). This means that, initially, the MNLF was not concerned with MILF and its deal with the Philippine government. Moreover, before Misuari and the MNLF were charged by the Philippine government of rebellion, the two Moro dissident movements tried to merge their groups in November 2001 (Elamparo, 2014). It was only after this period that the MNLF began protesting against any agreements between MILF and the Philippine officials.

This points out that the MNLF began perceiving the MILF only as a threat after 2001. This was triggered by the fact that in the previous months, the MNLF’s position as the Moro representative was undermined by the Philippine government and its critics. That is, the Filipino leaders blamed Nur Misuari for the failure of autonomy and the underdevelopment of the Moro people. Moreover, they supported and installed into power the breakaway members of the MNLF, who tried to remove Misuari from his position as the chairman of the MNLF. Besides these, the Philippine government now focused its attention on the MILF, which gradually suppressed the presence of the MNLF. This led to the lessening of the Moros and Filipinos’ interest in the MNLF as a negotiating party on behalf of the Moro people. The group was further weakened by the eventual arrest of Misuari, which affected its solidarity. In addition, the discernable support given by the Malaysian government to the MILF aggravated the exclusion of the MNLF. While the MNLF was dislodged from its position as the only representative of the Moros, the acknowledgment that the MILF got from the Malaysian government enhanced its international and domestic legitimacy.

In short, the MNLF was not worried about the MILF in the past because it had the authority over its Moro constituents. The group was perceived as the official source of

official Moro's position on issues regarding the Philippine state and its policies on the Moros. In relation, it was given priority when it comes to negotiating with the Moros. However, domestic criticisms against the group and the international support given to its rival led the group to lose its power and position. Therefore, the real issue for the MNLF was its destabilization and marginalization in the Moro society. With this, it needed to reconstitute its identity and legitimize its authority over the Moros.

In the enhancement of their legitimacy, the two dissident groups involved in the conflict – the MNLF and MILF – recognized that international recognition is important. Accordingly, in the previous years, the MNLF capitalized on the assistance of the OIC to present itself as the main negotiating party on behalf of the Moro people. With this, the group was able to maintain the Philippine government's attention. That is, the Filipino leaders conducted peace talks mainly with the MNLF through the mediation of the OIC. Recently, the MILF also embarked on a quest to garner international acknowledgment to increase its legitimacy domestically. The support of Malaysia provided the MILF with such an opportunity (Harish, 2006).

On the other hand, this connection between Malaysia and MILF gave the MNLF an opportunity to delegitimize the MILF. By using the incidents with the Philippine and Malaysian governments, the MNLF reinterpreted the events as actions against the unity of the Moro people and subsequently, reconstructed the role of Malaysia as a foreign colonizer and a co-conspirator of the Philippine government. With this, the MNLF also implicated that the MILF was involved in the conspiracy between the Philippine and Malaysian governments. Therefore, the discourse of MNLF against Malaysia is a strategy to re-establish themselves as the only legitimate representative of the Moros.

3.3. Re-imagination of Malaysia in the MNLF's discourse

In the early days of the Moro movement, the MNLF had constituted the Moro identity through depicting itself as part of the bigger Islamic world. That is, the MNLF considered the other Islamic nations as the Muslim sisters and brothers of the Moro. Particularly, they referred to the Malaysians as their kin who were also victimized by Philippine aggression. With the acknowledgment of the Malaysians and other Muslim nations, the MNLF legitimized their construction of the Moros as a different nation from the Filipinos. This unique constitution of the Moro people opened a space for challenging the Philippine

authority over them. More importantly, it granted the MNLF the status of being the representative of the Moro people and the leading authority in the Moro's struggle for freedom. Nevertheless, the group's legitimacy was threatened by the rise of the MILF, which was given more attention starting in 2001. That is, since this period, the MILF has been perceived by the Philippine and Malaysian government as the main representative of the Moro people. For this reason, the MNLF was gradually displaced from its position as the vanguard of the Moros and the authentic source of Moro narratives. To reassert its legitimacy, not only did the MNLF had to exclude Philippine and MILF but it also had to reject Malaysia. This rejection of Malaysia provided the group a second-layer of exclusion, which made the exclusion of the MILF and the Philippine government more natural. Accordingly, the MNLF rewrote the role of Malaysia in the struggle of the Moro people. First, the MNLF depicted Malaysia as a colonizer like the Philippine state. Second, the MNLF depicted Malaysia as a co-conspirator of the Philippines against the Moro people. Third, the MNLF depicted the Malaysian government as an example of doing un-Islamic practices.

Malaysia as a colonizer of the Moro land

Following the ousting of Nur Misuari as the leader of the MNLF and ARMM, and the conduct of peace negotiation between the MILF and the Philippine government, the MNLF has been criticizing Malaysia. Particularly, the Sabah issue was re-opened by the MNLF as a counter-narrative against the Malaysian government. Accordingly, a spokesperson of the MNLF-Bangsamoro council based in Jeddah said that the act of removing Misuari from MNLF and ARMM was manipulated by the Philippine and Malaysian governments because of the Sabah issue. He explained that in order to end the Sabah case between the two states, the Malaysian government conspired with the Philippine government by assuring Philippine President Arroyo that it would assist in financing her election campaign (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002a). In return, the Malaysian government expected the Philippine government to ignore the Sabah issue. This statement developed into the construction of Malaysia as a colonizer of the Moro homeland just like the Philippine state.

In the MNLF's re-imagination of Malaysia, the Malaysian government had stolen Sabah and Sarawak from the Sulu Sultanate and made these lands its colonies. As the secretary-general of the MNLF Central Committee, Ustaz Murshi Ibrahim claimed, "The territory

you call Sabah belongs to the Tausug Bangsamoros – legally, rightfully and historically” (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002b). Accordingly, the MNLF’s reconstruction of Malaysia stated that in the 1960s the Malaysian government was said to have staged a mocked referendum wherein they bribed and exploited the Moro leaders from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi to support Malaysia’s agenda of colonizing Sabah. The Philippine government made a counter-claim by justifying that the Sultanate of Sulu was under the Philippine state territory and therefore, Sabah and Sarawak were part of the Philippines. Moreover, the Filipino leaders said that since the Malaysian government continued to pay lease money to the Sultan of Sulu, it is an indication that it did not own the land. The Malaysian government was anxious about the Philippine claim and this prompted its leaders to join the association of states composed of the Philippines and Indonesia*. This strategy, however, failed. That is because in 1968 the Philippine administration under Philippine President Marcos induced the Sultan of Sulu to legitimize the Philippine government’s claim on Sabah. This led to the mobilization of Moro youths who were trained in the Corregidor Island. According to the MNLF’s statements, these young Moro recruits mutinied because they did not want to infiltrate Sabah, especially that some of their relatives were living there. When Malaysia learned about the operation, it took advantage of the situation and seemingly supported the Moro leaders in the 1970s in their fight against Philippine colonialism. However, the MNLF claimed that it was a mere tactical move to hide the Kuala Lumpur’s real agenda of continuing its illegal occupation of Sabah (Abadi, n.d.). In other words, the MNLF was supported by the Malaysian not because they wanted the group to win against the Philippine state and gain the Moro’s freedom. Instead, it wanted to avert the Philippine aggressive claim on Sabah. In Misuari’s words, “Malaysia, was in a state of war with Marcos. In order to survive, they needed us to divert Marcos’ ire from Sabah, from Malaysia” (Al Jazeera English, 2013a).

According to the MNLF, the rich natural resources in Sabah spurred the Malaysians to usurp and claim it as its own. Misuari said, “The Moro homeland is so rich... so that is why many people want to occupy this land” (Al Jazeera English, 2013b). Subsequently, the MNLF portrayed the Malaysian state as similar to the Philippine state. Whereas the Philippines have exploited the mineral, agricultural and aquatic resources of

* The organization was called MAPHILINDO, which was the predecessor of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

MINSUPALA, the Malaysian colonizers have exploited the natural resources in Sabah. Specifically, the Malaysian colonizers were said to have taken the mineral, oil, timber and other agricultural riches in Sabah and Sarawak. From these resources, the MNLF allegedly claimed that Malaysia profits billions of American dollars. This huge income was used to develop the Malaysian capital city and other poor federal Malaysian states. Meanwhile, only three percent of the profit was allegedly sent back to Sabah. Besides this, the MNLF stated that the Malaysian government officials had greatly benefited from these economic projects in Sabah and improved their status in the Malay society (MNLF Official Website, 2013). For this reason, Misuari asserted, “Malaysia does not want to budge an inch from our sacred land, Sabah, and Sarawak. That’s the biggest issue from this because they are earning a lot of money from here, from this” (Al Jazeera English, 2013b).

The MNLF also asserted that this economic agenda remains to be the reason for the continued interference of the Malaysian government in the Moro affairs. That is why the MNLF believed that Malaysia would do whatever it takes to make Sabah remain in its possession. This includes the expulsion of the Moros who fled to Malaysia after the fighting between government forces and Moro rebels erupted in the 1970s. In 2002, Malaysian officers reported that the Moros are illegally staying in Sabah and Sarawak. They were subsequently deported back to the Philippines. The MNLF members condemned this massive deportation to which they said, “We strongly urge the United Nations General Assembly to condemn this inhuman, barbaric, and atrocious mass deportation of Bangsamoro refugees, who in the first place have historic, legal and sovereign rights to dwell in that territory” (“MNLF assembly,” 2002). Moreover, the group interpreted the action of the Malaysian government under Prime Minister Mahathir as a declaration of an all-out war against the Moro people (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002c). Subsequently, the MNLF leaders proclaimed the independence of the Moro ancestral homeland including Sabah, from the Philippine and Malaysian colonizers in the group’s Koronadal Declaration (Fabillion, 2002).

The MNLF’s claim on Sabah as part of the Bangsamoro national boundary was reiterated after another incident in 2013. This incident was called the Lahad Datu stand-off wherein Malaysia was involved in a fight against Muslims from Sulu. According to the MNLF’s narration of the event, the unfortunate fight between the Malaysian forces against the

Sultan of Sulu's people started with a peaceful visit. The crown prince of the Sulu Sultanate and his family went to Kampung Tandou in Sabah, Malaysia. They were accompanied by the Sultan of Sulu and North Borneo (SSNB) royal security army and some Tausug* civilians. These travelers from Sulu perceived the journey as an ordinary visit to their homeland. However, the Malaysian government perceived it as an invasion and used full force to remove the crown prince and his companions. After that, it quickly turned into a massacre which the MNLF compared to the massacre committed by the American colonizers in the 1930s. As an act of retaliation, the supporters of the Sultan were said to have ambushed a convoy of Malaysian police. Consequently, the Malaysian government prepared their army for an all-out-war, giving their forces the directives to kill every suspicious-looking people in Sabah in their hunt for the crown prince and his followers. This left out only two choices for the crown prince and his aides: total surrender or face being annihilated (MNLF Official Website, 2013).

The brutish action of the Malaysian government was quickly condemned by the MNLF. According to Nur Misuari, the Sultan of Sulu and his heirs have the right to claim Sabah as their own. He also said that the Tausugs, as one of the representatives of the Bangsamoro people, can claim ownership of the land ("Misuari: Bangsamoro", 2013). Furthermore, Misuari urged the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak to not persecute the civilians who are of Moro descent or else the MNLF would be forced to be involved in the conflict (MT Webmaster, 2013). This warning was repeated by a spokesperson for the group. He said that a long war could possibly be launched against Malaysia if the Malaysian government did not stop with its campaign against the Tausugs in Sabah (Echeminada & Laude, 2013).

This discourse of MNLF was not only a reaction to the events in the Philippines and in Malaysia. The group used the events and interpreted them to its advantage. In other words, the discourse of MNLF against Malaysia was part of its strategy to attain again its legitimacy as the real representative of the Moro people. For this reason, the depiction of Malaysia as a colonizer served important functions. First, it undermined the Malaysian role in the peace process, which also prevented the completion of the peace agreement. Subsequently, by undermining the peace process, the MNLF also hindered the rise of the MILF. In other words, the MNLF wanted the Moro people to perceive the Malaysian

* One of the ethnic Muslim tribes in the Philippines

government's assistance in the pursuit of peace as insincere. With this, it gave the MNLF justification to examine and oppose the peace agreement being prepared by the Philippine government and being mediated by the Malaysian government. This reinforced also their depiction of the MILF as a mere pawn which submits to the plans of Malaysia and Philippines. Second, it created an opening for another counter-discourse wherein the Malaysian government was made as a co-conspirator of the Philippine state. That is, since the two governments were colonizing the same people, they were cooperating with each other to further their colonial agenda. Accordingly, the MNLF used the Lahad Datu incident to demonstrate the conspiracy of the two government. For instance, the MNLF stated that the excessive use of force against the Tausugs in Sabah showed the Malaysians' disregard for the lives of the Moro people. At the same time, the MNLF also criticized the Philippine government for accusing the Sultan of Sulu of instigating the violence. According to one of the MNLF spokespersons, the president should protect its citizens and presumed them innocent until they were proven guilty (Cerveza, 2013). Nevertheless, the president's demand on the Sultan's men to surrender just showed that they were in connivance with the Malaysian government, an alliance which the MNLF condemned. Thusly, Misuari denounced the Philippine president's reproach on the Sultan of Sulu. He said that he would not forgive the President if he continued to talk against the Sultan (Bowie, 2013). With this, the MNLF interpreted the event as another rejection of the Moro people by the Philippine government. For the group, the Philippine state did not care about the Moro homeland nor for its purported citizens. This leads to the third function of the MNLF's discourse which was to renew its struggle against the Philippines. In other words, the peace negotiation was interpreted by the MNLF as the continued interference and colonization of the two states. Subsequently, this gave the group justification to revive its fight for independence against the Philippine state, an aim which the MILF has abandoned. Finally, the MNLF's discourse assisted in redefining the new boundaries of the Moro homeland and reconstituting the role and identity of the group. That is, the MNLF now included Sabah and Sarawak as part of the Moro people's ancestral homeland. The group declared that these lands belong originally to the Moros and therefore, it is the group's duty to defend and protect it. With this discourse, the MNLF also targeted the issue on the dropping of the Sabah claim by the Philippine government and the MILF. According to Misuari, the MILF-Philippine government peace deal with Malaysia as a mediator was actually an agreement to sell out Sabah. He revealed that Murad Ebrahim,

MILF's current leader, had stated that Sabah is not a priority for the MILF (Al Jazeera English, 2013b). With this, the MNLF believed that the Philippine government and MILF's disregard for Sabah invalidated their claim as the true representative of the Moro people.

Malaysia as a co-conspirator in the Philippine colonialism

The Malaysian government was also described by the group as an accomplice of the Philippine state in the colonization of the Moro people. In the words of the MNLF secretary-general, Ustaz Murshi Ibrahim, "The enemy of our fight for self-determination can hatch a hundred conspiracies to liquidate the MNLF and its leadership, as it had done in the past" (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002b). Accordingly, in the new narratives of the MNLF, the collusion between the Malaysian and the Philippine government had started during the early days of the MNLF's struggle. In the new MNLF statements, the Malaysian government wanted to thwart the Philippine government claims on Sabah in the 1960s. That is why, it took advantage of the sentiments of the Moros, supported, and trained them to fight the Philippine army. The Malaysian's real intentions were to dictate the moves and steer the Moros away from also claiming Sabah. While Kuala Lumpur seemed to support the Moros in their battle against the Philippine government, it also plotted with the Philippine state to prevent the MNLF from being recognized in the OIC. The MNLF claimed that in the first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur in 1974, the Malaysian government purportedly downgraded the Moro problem as an 'internal conflict'. Instead of supporting the full independence of the Moro people, the Malaysian government advocated only for autonomy to preserve the Philippine territorial integrity (Abadi, n.d.). In the end, the Malaysian government succeeded in restraining the Moros in their struggle for full independence because the MNLF reluctantly agreed to have an autonomous region for the Moro. Nevertheless, the Malaysian government failed to fully close the Sabah issue.

For this reason, the MNLF stated that Malaysia waited several years to fully undermine the Moro people's struggle and end the Sabah dispute for good (Abadi, n.d.). This opportunity came during the time of President Arroyo in 2001. According to the MNLF, the Philippine government and the Malaysian government tried to mislead the Moro people by discrediting Nur Misuari. That is, the two states created the MNLF-EC with the aim of stripping Misuari's authority as the chairman of the MNLF and the Southern

Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and as the governor of ARMM. This MNLF-EC was composed of 15 MNLF leaders and members who were against the leadership of Nur Misuari. They were purportedly bribed by the two governments to accuse Misuari of incompetence, abuse of power and incapability to deliver his promise to the Bangsamoro people. One of the people who allegedly betrayed Misuari said that Misuari was given enough time to improve the status of the Moro people but because of his ineptness, the advancement of the Moro people was not actualized (Conde, 2001a). Besides framing Misuari, the MNLF said that the MNLF-EC was used by the two governments to convince the OIC that Nur Misuari no longer represents the MNLF and the Moro people (MNLF Official Website, 2012). In return for their duplicity, the Philippine government installed them into power by declaring them as the new leaders of the MNLF and of ARMM.

With this event, the head of the MNLF-Bangsamoro Independence Council based in Jeddah charged the Arroyo administration of creating the MNLF- EC 15 for the purpose of installing people who would support her in the upcoming election. Moreover, the head of the council stated that the creation of the MNLF-EC 15 was a classic strategy employed by the Philippine government to disorganize the Moro freedom fighters and to confuse the Moro people (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002a). Meanwhile, the MNLF also claimed that the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir supported the Arroyo administration, promising her of funds for the campaign, in return for closing the Sabah issue. This was also the reason why Malaysia willingly arrested Misuari when he escaped the Philippines after being charged as the instigator of the Sulu rebellion in 2001. When Misuari was deported back to the Philippines more than a month after, the Malaysian government said that it was part of their commitment and promise to the Philippine government (Baruah, 2002). In response, the MNLF reacted by saying that Malaysia's action was a big mistake. Particularly, a high-ranking leader of the MNLF had described the event as a scheme conspired by high-level officials in the two governments (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002b).

According to the MNLF, this conspiracy between the Malaysian and Philippine governments was repeated in 2012 with the conception of FAB. This agreement was created by the Philippine government with the MILF through the mediation of Malaysia under the administration of the Prime Minister Tun Najib Abdul Razak. The aim of this

agreement was to dismantle ARMM and create another autonomous territory for the Moro people, but the MNLF criticized the deal itself for several reasons. First, the MNLF doubted the consistency and commitment of the Philippine state in pursuing and implementing this agreement. For the group, the creation of this new agreement meant that the Philippine government disregarded and unilaterally abrogated the peace accords it had signed with the MNLF. Thus, the MNLF described it as “creating another euphoria of hope and peace in the Bangsamoro homeland similar to the atmosphere and situation in 1976, 1987, and 1996” but without really fulfilling them (RRayhanR, 2012). In other words, the group believed that if the government can easily discard an agreement without consulting the other party, then it can also do the same thing with the MILF. Second, the MNLF implicates that the agreement did not seek to pursue peace in Mindanao. According to Nur Misuari, the people who crafted the agreement were motivated by greed and evil intention, which was to make the Moro people remain under their colonial rule. For Misuari, the Malaysian and Philippine governments just wanted to create instability and crisis among the Moros so that they would not be able to fight and pursue their claim on Sabah and Sarawak as a united people (Ridzdream, 2012). Third, the MNLF suspected Malaysia of supporting the MILF-Philippine peace agreement because it was afraid of a Moro independence under the leadership of the MNLF. Specifically, the Malaysian government did not want the MNLF leader Nur Misuari because it knew that he would not compromise the status of Sabah (MNLF Official Website, 2012). Meanwhile, the Malaysian government supported the MILF because it believed that MILF does not have any interest in claiming Sabah and Sarawak. For this reason, the MNLF referred the MILF as pawns and puppets of Philippines and Malaysia. Particularly, Nur Misuari said about MILF, “they are not literate enough to understand the hidden agenda of Malaysia and the Philippines” (Ridzdream, 2012). In other words, the MNLF was claiming that the MILF did not realize that it was falling into the trap plotted by the two states. Accordingly, Misuari stated that this was the reason why the MILF agreed to exchange the thirteen provinces originally part of ARMM for only five small autonomous provinces. In addition, the MNLF believed that the MILF’s naivety could lead to another tragedy, especially due to their agreement with the Philippine government on the disarmament of the Moro fighters (Misuari, 2012).

This portrayal of the Malaysian government as a co-conspirator of the Philippine government served the MNLF in reasserting itself as the legitimate representative of the

Moro people. Firstly, by exposing the alleged real intentions of the Malaysian and Philippine government, it hampered the completion of the new peace agreement. In other words, the MNLF's discourse stirred the Moro people to examine closely the role of Malaysia as the peace broker in the peace negotiation and made them more cautious in accepting the peace agreement. Through this, the MNLF shattered the foundation of the MILF support and subsequently, obstructed it from becoming the recognized representative of the Moro people. Second, by portraying Malaysia and the Philippines as the one pulling the strings, it impaired the legitimacy of the MILF. This meant that the MILF was either too naive to know the scheme of the two states or that it was a willing pawn to the colonial designs of Malaysia and the Philippines. If this was the case, the MILF, then, did not embody the real demands of the Moro people. It was just a puppet pursuing the demands of its masters. Finally, by revealing the conspiracy among the MILF, the Philippine, and the Malaysian government, it resurrected the MNLF's struggle for independence. In relation, it reinforced the MNLF's attempt to re-legitimize itself as the authentic representative of the Moro people by consolidating the Moros who wanted independence rather than autonomy.

Malaysia as an example of doing un-Islamic practices

In 2001, when Nur Misuari was charged with instigating a rebellion in Jolo against the government, he fled to Malaysia to escape arrest. However, the Malaysian government seized Misuari and accused him of illegal entry. During this time, the Malaysian leaders did not offer to help him. According to the news, Malaysian leaders understood the struggle of Misuari for the Moro people; however, for them, it was a mistake to take the 'wrong direction.' Moreover, a youth chief of United Malays National Organization (UMNO) spoke against Misuari's actions saying, "We cannot let individuals smear the name of Islam. We cannot let individuals equate the name of Islam with violence" (Villanueva & Calica, 2001).

The MNLF responded by characterizing Malaysian leaders as practicing un-Islamic policies. Initially, this was used to describe the deportation of Misuari from Malaysia back to the Philippines. In the MNLF's discourse, the MNLF leader was unfairly charged with instigating rebellion in the Philippines in 2001. Since the accusation of the Philippine state was said to be a mere fabrication, this was the reason why Misuari fled to Malaysia to seek political asylum. However, the Malaysian government under Prime Minister

Mahathir Mohamad charged and arrested the Moro leader for ‘illegal entry’ and later deported him despite the intervention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the OIC secretary-general. On the other hand, the MNLF justified that Misuari had a diplomatic passport and that he went to Malaysia not to escape Philippine authorities. Instead, he was about to go to Indonesia but stopped by Sabah due to an invitation (Tapaoan, 2002a). That is why the MNLF believed that the action of the Malaysian authorities was unjustified and a violation of Islamic principle. With this, the Bangsamoro religious leaders issued a manifesto which declared Mahathir as an apostate of Islam (Tapaoan, 2002b). Furthermore, Professor Zaidi al-Amir, the spokesperson of Bangsamoro workers in the Gulf States, said that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad is “a bad example of a Muslim leader who can never be trusted by the Islamic Ummah to do justice to the oppressed humanity” (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002a). He further described the Prime Minister as “an immoral Muslim leader and a gross violator of human rights who does not only commit injustice against the Moro people, but he also terrorizes the Malaysian people with his draconian government” (Bangsamoro News Agency, 2002a).

The same accusation was said about the incident in Lahad Datu stand-off. When the crown prince of the Sultanate of Sulu and his companions went to visit what they perceived as their homeland, they were met with Malaysia’s brute force because the Malaysian authorities thought that they were there to invade their country. Besides attacking the crown prince and his men, the MNLF stated that the Malaysian government also committed many atrocities against the innocent Tausugs during their hunt for the prince and his companions. According to the MNLF, the Tausug residents reported that those who were suspected by the Malaysian forces were killed and tortured. Moreover, the survivors described the encounter with the Malaysian police forces as horrific because they were treated like animals (MNLF Official Website, 2013). Besides torturing and killing the people, it was also reported that the Malaysian authorities blocked the food supply for the crown prince and his group to force them to surrender (“Don’t harm”, 2013). When the United Nations (UN) called for a ceasefire, the Sultan of Sulu declared his compliance. Meanwhile, the Malaysian government rejected the peace call and prevented the entry of international bodies to assess the situation and give assistance to the affected people. This rejection of the ceasefire by the Malaysian government was criticized by the Sultan of Sulu. He stated that he did not understand why the Malaysian government did

not accept the ceasefire offered by him. For this reason, he accused Malaysia of being un-Islamic (Ribaya, 2013).

The MNLF supported the Sultan of Sulu in condemning Malaysia's un-Islamic behavior. The group said that the Malaysians conducted an ethnic cleansing of Moros in Sabah to prove that it has the sovereign rights over the land (RRayhanR, 2013). The MNLF believed that the tragedy could have been avoided if the Malaysian leaders, who professed that they are Muslims, have dealt with the Sabah issue in an Islamic manner. Instead, they did the exact opposite of that and perpetuated their colonization in Sabah. Moreover, the MNLF stated that the tension in Lahad Datu would have dissolved earlier if the Malaysian government engaged in peace talks rather than using force and threats because it made the situation worse (MNLF Official Website, 2013). Particularly, Misuari implored that Muslims should not be fighting with each other, especially that peace and the lives of Muslim youths are at stake (Orosa, 2013).

In addition to these incidents, the MNLF also alluded that the MILF-Philippine government peace deal, wherein the Malaysian government served as the third-party negotiator, was contrary to the teachings of Islam. According to Misuari, the peace agreement signed by the MNLF and the Philippine government under the auspices of the OIC members is still in enforcement. For this reason, another treaty that would be entered into by the Philippine government with other groups was tantamount to a superimposition of the deal already agreed. With this, Misuari quoted the Holy Qur'an in which he emphasized that it was the responsibility of the Islamic Ummah to commit to what it says or promise. This means that the OIC members, including Malaysia, should uphold the MNLF-Philippine agreement or else they would transgress the saying of the Holy Qur'an (Misuari, 2007).

This depiction of Malaysia was important for legitimizing the identity of the MNLF as representative of the Moro people. First, it re-emphasized the connection between Malaysia and the Philippines and their scheme against the Moros. That is, the MNLF portrayed Malaysia as no longer following its Islamic duties. Moreover, the group implied that Kuala Lumpur imitated Manila in committing genocide and perpetuating colonial rule in Mindanao and Sabah. The abandonment of its Islamic duties had also led the Malaysian government to conspire with the Philippines in deceiving and dividing the Moros into different groups so that they cannot pursue their goals of obtaining freedom.

Second, it invalidated the role of Malaysia as a fair mediator because it had forgotten their Islamic responsibilities. Subsequently, this challenged the role of Malaysia as the Muslim brothers and sisters of the Moros. With this, the MNLF detached itself from their previous status as an ally of the Malaysian government. Finally, this characterization of Malaysia also disputed the position of MILF as the vanguard of Islam and of the Moro people as it purports itself to be. In the MNLF's reasoning, if the Malaysian government no longer adhered to the Islamic teachings, it is possible that the MILF, being associated with the Malaysian government, had also done the same. Accordingly, Misuari said in an interview that the MILF members should have been arrested and imprisoned because they were criminals (Cabal, 2016). Meanwhile, the MNLF members constituted themselves as the true and devoted believers of Islam (Misuari, 2007). With this, the group tried to re-stabilize their identity as the legitimate representative of the Moro people based on their commitment to seek the freedom of the Moro people while promoting peace in accordance with the will of Allah.

CONCLUSION

The resistance of the Moro people against the Philippine state would not have been possible if there was no clear distinction between the Moros and the Filipinos. It is this separation which justifies their call for independence and the creation of their own homeland. However, this delineation between the Moros and the Filipinos is not natural. Rather, it is enacted through discourse, particularly the inscription of the world. This means that by writing about the world, the Moro dissident groups institutionalized their perception of the Moro identity, their claim as a distinct nation, and their resistance against the Philippines. Particularly, the MNLF incorporated Malaysia in its discourse to institutionalize its own perception of the Moro identity and subsequently, to exclude the Philippine state from its domain.

For instance, in the 1970s, the MNLF used Malaysia as its anchor in justifying that the Moros were first and foremost a Muslim nation. This means, that for the group, the Moros were relatively part of other Muslim nations like Malaysia. At the same time, the MNLF implied that the Filipinos were different from the Moros due to this religious difference. This difference was supported by its repeated depiction of the Philippine state as a Christian nation, which the group accused of enforcing the anti-Muslim campaign. For this reason, the group claimed that the Moros were not Filipinos and that the Philippines was not their state. In conclusion, by incorporating Malaysia in its discourse, the MNLF was able to consolidate the Moro people by emphasizing the “self” as having an Islamic identity. Meanwhile, the group relegated the Philippines state as the “other” since it was a threat to the Islamic faith and consequently, to the identity and unity of the Moros.

Although the MNLF emerged as the main actor in the Moro resistance against the Philippine state, this does not mean that it was able to monopolize the production of the Moro discourse until the present. This was evident especially during the events in 2001 wherein Misuari was arrested, the MNLF group experienced schism, and the MILF rose as an alternative voice for the Moro people. These events had led the MNLF to be displaced from its position. For this reason, the group had to repair its identity and re-establish itself as the authentic basis of the Moro identity. This time, however, the MNLF was not only facing against the Philippine state but also the MILF. Subsequently, the MNLF had to use Malaysia as its anchor in countering the Philippine government and its rival group. Unlike before, the MNLF had constructed Malaysia as an enemy of the Moros.

In relation, the MNLF constituted the Philippine state and the MILF as the enemies of the Moro people because of their collaboration with the Malaysian government. Through this, Malaysia was no longer perceived as an important factor in the construction of the Moro identity but was used to create the boundary between the MNLF and its adversaries. As a result, the MNLF distanced itself from the MILF by emphasizing that the group is the true protector of the Moro homeland, including Sabah. Also, the MNLF used this conspiracy between the MILF, Manila and Kuala Lumpur as justification to reignite their fight for independence.

With this, it can be said that the relevance of this thesis lies on its offer to provide another way of understanding the Philippine-Moro conflict by filling the gap that was not dealt thoroughly in the previous studies. That is, this study tried to look beyond the general understanding of oppression and emancipation, which was the focus of the previous studies. On the other hand, this study presupposes that the Moro dissident groups are not only resistant movements against the Philippine state, but they are also entities capable of creating their own alternative realities which give them the opportunity to exercise power on their purported subjects. For instance, the MNLF constructed a Moro identity and re-imagined the Moro history, which allowed the group to have authority over the Moro people. In addition, the group legitimized this constructed identity and history by practicing Foreign Policy, which means the incorporation of external actors in the group's discourse.

By looking through the discourse of the MNLF and the context in which it was made, it is revealed that the MNLF's perceptions are not mere reactions to what was going on around them. The group's statements were deliberately produced to create its alternative realities and allowed them to deconstruct the realities imposed upon the Moros and reject the identities that were previously subjected to them. Accordingly, the MNLF's depiction of Malaysians as brothers and sisters has assisted the group to create the Moro as a unique identity and disconnected it from the Filipino identity. Moreover, this depiction of Malaysia allowed the MNLF to attach itself to the bigger Islamic world, which provided it with international legitimacy in its fight against the Philippine state. When the MNLF's discourse of Malaysia changed in the recent years, it was another strategic production of realities to respond to another marginalization enacted by the Philippine state. Thusly, the MNLF portrayed Malaysia as a collaborator of the Philippine government and the MILF

to counter its adversaries. Despite the reversal in the constitution of Malaysia, the general purpose of incorporating Malaysia in its discourse remains to be the same, which is to normalize its authority and delegitimize its enemy.

It must be noted, however, that this study did not concern itself with the accuracy and the truthfulness of the MNLF's discourse. Rather, this study investigated how the MNLF normalized its perceptions on certain events and made the Moros accept these narratives as infallible truths. Moreover, this study examined how the MNLF used its interpretations on events to garner support from their international community which further legitimized its position as the main representative of the Moro people. Finally, this study analyzed how the MNLF's narratives on Malaysia added a second layer to its rejection on the Philippine state and the MILF and made its opposition to these two actors more credible and compelling.

Since this research was limited to the study of MNLF's discourse, it would be beneficial as well to study the MNLF's rival group. In other words, by examining MILF's discourse, researchers would be able to understand how the MILF became an important figure in the Moro struggle, especially in the 2000s. Like the MNLF, the MILF certainly has their own interpretations of domestic and world events which put forwards itself as the legitimate representative of the Moro people. Not only will this study add more to the understanding of the Philippine-Moro conflict, but also to the discursive strategies of dissident groups within the Philippines and other countries. Moreover, it will add knowledge to the practice of 'foreign policy' among the resistant movements.

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