

Identity, Land, and the Politics of Add and Rule

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In the past, the tendency of the different Mindanao tribes was to emphasize their differences instead of their commonalities. Their tribal identities dominated their relationship with each other. And so they fought each other to control human and material resources.

Since many of the tribes were fragmented, they also fought among themselves. The Manobos fought Manobos, the Mandayas fought Mandayas, etc. The frequent intertribal and intratribal wars strengthened the sense of independent clan or community identity as no supreme leader emerged who could unify the tribe or tribes.¹

Present Mindanao ethnography counts 18 Lumad tribes and 13 Moro tribes.² You can just imagine how turbulent Mindanao was because of this diversity and lack of unity among the various tribes and communities. As the Maguindanaos and Tausugs reached a higher level of social and political organization, they were able to control a wider territory in Mindanao. In addition, they freely raided the Visayas, even Luzon. It is said there are still areas in Moroland today where the Tausugs and Maguindanaos had

But this did not mean that the Tausugs and Maguindanaos had complete control over the other tribes. The other tribes would also fight back, but invariably they would lose because the Moros had more advanced weapons. In Davao, there were communities who paid tribute to the Maguindanaos, but they were more independent than vassals of the Maguindanaos. This means the Tausugs and Maguindanaos were still continuing their campaign to subjugate the other tribes. The tribes therefore largely retained their separate distinct identities.

When the Spaniards arrived, they fought the Tausugs and Maguindanaos for control of territory and tribes in Mindanao. In Davao, this only began in 1848 when Jose Oyanguren wrested the territory from the Kalagan Moros. To civilize the tribes, the Spaniards rounded up the inhabitants and forced them into reductions. Because they were not used

to living in concentrated settlements, and they had to pay tribute besides, the tribes escaped to the mountains at every opportunity. Sometimes the Lumads launched treacherous attacks to get even. The Spaniards largely blamed the Moros for the failure to reduce the Lumads.

In 1888 Jesuit priest Pablo Pastells made this observation about the Moros.

It is well-known that the people of Mindanao and Jolo are of bellicose character. They live in far places away from the capital of the archipelago and look askance at Spanish domination, and therefore they try time and again to consolidate their independence through piratical raids undertaken all these year, without the haphazard retaliations of our soldiers nor the evangelical preaching of our missionaries having been able to put a stop to their infamous attacks.³

To destroy Moro power, Pastells suggested the following steps to Governor General Valeriano Weyler:

The policy... (is) to isolate them completely in the interior by means of the missions and when necessary establish some military posts among the nearby pagan population. Following the mission and the establishment of the military inside the dominion of the Moros, villages should be formed, whether with people living in the locality, or by fomenting the immigration of people from Bohol or from Ilocos. Every year either a fixed company of married soldiers should be established to be taken from the standing army all over the islands, or married deportees should be settled, including slaves or other vassals of the datu wishing to live under the protection of our flag.⁴

The Spaniards were kicked out in 1899 without having succeeded in subjugating the Moros and the Lumads. Under their rule, there were only very few settlers who came to Mindanao. Many of them were disciplinarios and deportees, that is, criminal and political offenders from Luzon and the Visayas.

When the Americans saw Mindanao, they were simply amazed at the fertility of the soil. They called Cotabato the "land of promise,"⁵ and Davao "the garden of the gods."⁶ They proceeded to transform the island into abaca and coconut plantations. But the Lumads resisted plantation work.⁷ So severe was the labor shortage the Americans recruited workers from the Visayas, including Japanese labor.

The American planters and officials of the Moro Province⁸ had originally sought to annex Mindanao as a territory of the United States.⁹ They wanted to turn it into a white man's country,¹⁰ and at one time,

encouraged Italians or Armenians to settle in Mindanao.¹¹ But this project failed. And so they had to turn to the northern islands to recruit labor.

The recruitment of laborers actually served two purposes. It did not only solve the acute labor shortage, it also effectively diluted the Moro and Lumad populations. It had taken the Americans 10 years before they could impose complete hegemony in Mindanao, and to consolidate their rule, they now put the politics of add and rule in full swing.

Under the Americans, particularly during the Commonwealth period, Japanese plantations flourished in Davao. Workers and settlers also flocked to Davao. By the end of 1930, the demographic profile of Davao had changed. The settlers now outnumbered the natives. Imagine that annually, almost 10,000 settlers arrived in Davao.¹² With the encouragement of the Republic of the Philippines,¹³ more settlers continued to pour into Mindanao so that today, the demography of the island has been totally changed. Now the natives have become the minority in their own land.

What Pastells had recommended to arrest the expansion and consolidation of the Moros, as well as the Lumads, has finally become a reality. If you look at the placement of the settler communities, you will see how they were designed to cut up the territory of the original Mindanawons. The settlements were really an extension of war. I call this civilian warfare, in which civilians are used to advance the strategic goals of war.¹⁴

The Lumads fought the Spaniards and Americans, but because they were defeated they resorted to evasion and flight to the mountains. In that way, they were not conquered and thus retained their identity as a tribe. The Moros likewise retained their identity as they were also successful in resisting the foreigners.

In retaining their identity they also retained their own culture. The terms for their political leaders such as sultan and datu, which the Spaniards also sought to make obsolete,¹⁵ persist. But where is their land?

In the past, if you said Bagobo, it did not only mean a person. It also meant language, clothing, customs, and religion. And most of all, if you said Bagobo, you meant Lobo, Digos, Tudaya, Toril, Bansalan, Makilala, Mt. Apo, and Sibulan, the known centers of the Bagobos. In short, when you spoke the word Bagobo it automatically meant territory.

That is also the meaning of the identity of the other tribes. The name of the tribe carries with it a constellation of meanings rooted in the territory. Each tribe had its own territory that it defended against the intrusion of other tribes. Oral history tells of a treaty forged among the

Dibabawons, Mansakas, and Mangguwagans to define the boundaries of their respective territories so as to avoid conflict. The treaty was agreed upon even if each tribe did not have a supreme leader. But like the Bagobos, the Mangguwangans, Mansakas, and Dibabawons have no clear territories of their own today. This is also true to all the other tribes, including the Moros.

The Lumads and Moros have two reactions to this altered situation in Mindanao. Some have become very shy, while others have become very angry.

We can observe the shyness among the Lumads. In fact, many of them are ashamed of being Lumad because as a tribe they have been left behind in terms of development. They are considered backward, if not uncivilized. They are marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. In the past, their songs and epics celebrated the glory of their tribe and the pride of their baganis and braves — Tuwaang, Agyo, Sandayo. But now what you hear are the laments of their fate.

As a Mandaya chanter puts it: "All our land is gone/ O gone is our pristine world... Our dignity is trampled upon/ O we have become worthless/ O they have become powerful/ These aliens on our land."¹⁶

And the Tbolis lament: "This lake of Sebu/ Other people claim it/ Other people lord over it/ The Tbolis have nowhere to go/ The outsiders have prevailed/ They rule over the Tbolis/ Do you understand my song?"¹⁷

We can also hear these laments of the Lumads in conferences and forums.¹⁸ It is not only land that has been taken away from the Lumads. Their gold, arts and crafts have also been taken away.¹⁹ Even their souls are being taken away, and they fear they will be exterminated in the near future.

As one Bagobo puts it: "Our problem is not illiteracy. It is assimilation that is slowly depriving us of our identity as Tagabawa Bagobo."²⁰

That is why a lot of the Lumads were happy when the Department of Environment and Natural Recourses (DENR) issued Department Administrative Order No. 2 (DAO 2) that paved the way for the Lumads to claim and own their ancestral domain, or what is left of their inheritance. This department order was passed by Congress. This was People's Rights Act (IPRA) that was upheld by the Supreme Court.²¹

But some of the tribes are not too happy with this law because it was made outside the tribe, it was written in a foreign tongue, it had no sanctions from the elders, and it contained totally alien provisions regarding the ownership, titling and registration of the land.²² Aside

from these objections, what is this so-called ancestral domain compared to the vast territory that they owned not so long ago? It is a simple case of the state being

in the process of colonizing the lands and resources of the indigenous peoples and communities, and its weapon of choice is the IPRA.²³

In other words, IPRA continues the relentless assault on an appropriation of the land that the Mindanawns have experienced since the arrival of the Spaniards. That is why for some of them it is not shame they feel but anger.

Many of us from the majority culture raise our eyebrows when we hear about the complaints of the Lumads. We operate from the framework that all this is Philippine territory, the state has sovereignty over all the land, and all citizens enjoy the right of transferability of residence within the said territory.

But while here in Cebu almost everybody is Cebuano, the language is Cebuano, the customs are Cebuano, this statement is not 'transferable' to Davao. We cannot say Davao is inhabited by Dabawnons, the language is Dabawnon, and the customs are Dabawnon. Because Davao today is Cebuano, with some admixture of the other tribes from other places. The Bagobos themselves, and Giangans, Mansakas, Dibabawons have all been dispersed in remote areas.

I wonder how the descendants of Dagohoy would feel if Tagbilaran were now controlled by Maranaws, Tubigon by Maguindanaws, Jagna by Manobos, Sagbayan and Belar by Bagobos, and Antiquiera by Mangguwangans? Would they not establish a Bol-anon Liberation Army?

As we can see in Mindanao this is not a hypothetical question. We know the response of the Moros. Their sense of identity has been strengthened and now they are struggling on various fronts to claim their own space where they can build their own independent political power and live a life of their own according to their own culture and beliefs.

Even if the Lumads are dispersed this has not prevented some of them to dream of Lumad unity. A few months ago, the Bungkatol Liberation Army emerged in Agusan del Sur. According to the reports, this army is composed of various Lumad tribes — Manobos, Higaonons, Mamanwas, Talaandigs, Barwaons, Mandayas, and Umayams.²⁴

In Cotabato, the Indigenous People's Federal Army announced its birth with a series of bombs to call attention to its demands.²⁵

How strong these groups are only time can tell. But these are signs that identity is a burning issue in Mindanao.²⁶ In the case of the Moros, they have gone a long way even if tribal tensions plague their ranks. They have waged a bitter struggle for 30 years, but the forces of the Philippine government have proved stronger and they still cannot establish their own independent political regime.

The Lumads face a more difficult problem because of the deep splits in identity, land and consciousness. They continue to be divided into small tribes. Their fragmentation prevents their political unity. Without unity, they have no power, no voice. This fragmentation is exacerbated by the fact that they do not occupy a contiguous territory. And therefore it is also difficult to forge a Lumad national consciousness.

These are just two of the more serious identity problems that we have inherited from the politics of add and rule that the Spaniards started, which the Americans intensified, and which the present government wants to perpetuate. Today, there is no need to add settlers anymore in Mindanao as the balance is already skewed in favor of the settlers.

Now the question: What is the future face of Mindanao?

If the Lumads and Moros only had their own power, the settlers would have long been deported from Mindanao. Today, this no longer appears possible. The demographic profile of Mindanao appears irreversible. The settlers have stayed here for three generations or so, and now consider themselves Mindanawns. For good or for ill, the so-called tripeople character of Mindanao is here to stay. The Lumads, Moros, and settlers now share the land.

We know the political goals of the Moro militants. After so many years of struggle, some of them have become so desperate they have resorted to bombings of civilian targets, and kidnappings and beheadings of innocent civilians.

On the other hand, what about the majority objective? What do we want to happen to the Moros and Lumads? Do we insist on integrating them or assimilating them? Or do we now launch the politics of subtraction, that is of exterminating them, so they will not trouble us anymore? Are we going to hold on tight to this seemingly divine law of Philippine sovereignty? Can we never give them a space where their identity and their land become one and the same again?

Notes

¹The Bagobo datus of Sibulan, Davao were considered 'higher' by other Bagobo polities, but the extent of their control or influence is not known. While the Tausugs and Maguindanaos reached a high level of political unification, their sultans were frequently challenged by powerful datus.

²The number of tribes is disputed. Some tribes, like the Mandayas, Mansakas, Kalagans, and Tagakaulos are so closely related they can be considered one tribe.

³Pablo Pastells. *Mission to Mindanao 1859-1900*. Peter Scheurs, trans. University of San Carlos Publications, Cebu City, 1994, 422.

⁴Pastells 1994, 428.

⁵*Mindanao Herald* (MH) 10 August 1907, MH 27 June 1908. Available documents show the term "Promised Land" was first applied to Cotabato, and later extended to mean the entire island.

⁶MH 22 April 1905. Davao attracted the most number of American planters.

⁷One of the causes of the social unrest in Davao during the first decade of American rule was the abuses against Lumads in American plantations. More details are discussed in my forthcoming book to be published by UP-CIDS.

⁸The Moro Province existed from 1903 to 1913. It had five districts, namely Zamboanga, Cotabato, Lanao, Sulu, and Davao. The governors were all Americans.

⁹MH 29 July 1905. The American planters clamored to detach all territories south of the Surigao Straits.

¹⁰MH 8 April 1905. Their dream was to transform the island into another Texas.

¹¹MH 23 December 1905, MH 30 December 1905.

¹²Shinzo Hayase, *Tribes, Settlers, and Administrators on a Frontier: Economic Development and Social Change in Davao, Southeastern Mindanao, The Philippines, 1899-1941, 1984*, 213. Hayase likewise provides earlier partial annual migration figures for Davao. The first large-scale migration began in 1913, with the colonial government appropriating P100,000 to finance the program.

¹³Aside from government-financed resettlement projects, many individuals and/or families came to Mindanao on their own initiative.

¹⁴Many so-called communal conflicts (Northern Ireland, Fiji, Sri Lanka) can be traced back to the colonial practice of resettling a people in other people's territory.

¹⁵Pastells (1984, 345) suggested to the Spanish colonial government that the political organization of the Moros should be altered, with the titles of sultan, datu, pandita, etc. replaced by gobernadorcillo, captain, justice, policeman, etc. so as to make them subjects of the King of Spain.

¹⁶*Mga Awit at Tugtuging Mandaya*, a song tape album, Development Education Media Services Foundation (DEMS), Davao City, 1989.

¹⁷*The Dream Weavers*, a video production, BookMark, Inc. 1999.

¹⁸I have noticed that indigenous peoples, including American Indians, invariably express their laments in conferences and gatherings.

¹⁹*Mga Awit at Tugtuging Mandaya*. 1989

²⁰Giovanni Manapol. "Lumad Education from a Lumad Perspective: The Bagobo Tagabawa Experience." Meeting the Challenges of Lumad Education: Summit on Lumad Education. Rene B. Alfonso and Pamela R. Castrillo, eds. Fulford Foundation, Davao City, 1999, 51.

²¹G. R. 135385, dated 6 December 2000. From Augusto B. Gatmaytan. "Political Implications of Banwaon Indigenous Law," *Tambura* 18, 2001, 53n1.

²²Gatmaytan 2001, 40.

²³Gatmaytan 2001, 52.

²⁴Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI) 23 March 2002, A13 "Lumad Army claims Abducting 8 DENR Workers."

²⁵PDI 25 March 2002, 1 "Bomb Scare Connected to Rizal Day Blasts, Says Intelligence Man." Philip C. Tubeza and Christian V. Esguerra.

²⁶In fact, it is still a burning issue all over the world.