

Summary of “Peace Lens: On the Horizontal Dimension of the Bangsamoro Peace Process” roundtable discussion (January 29, 2014)

Video link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mOywOs5WdA>

Four days before the conduct of this sixth Peace Lens roundtable discussion, both panels of the GPH-MILF Peace Process signed the Annex on Normalization, the last of the four annexes to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, which deals with decommissioning the armed wing of the MILF and outlines steps to disarm private armies in the proposed Bangsamoro area. Both panels also signed the Addendum on Bangsamoro Waters, which states the delineation of territorial waters that will be governed by the Bangsamoro entity as well as arrangements outside the region’s maritime limits.

With his background on legal frameworks on land questions and his work on indigenous peoples’ rights, Atty. Augusto 'Gus' Gatmaytan of the Ateneo Institute of Anthropology, Ateneo de Davao University, was invited to lead the discussion on horizontal aspects and challenges of the Bangsamoro peace process.

Atty. Gatmaytan discussed about the horizontal dimension (i.e. relations between groups within the Bangsamoro) of the GPH-MILF peace process that needs to be addressed more comprehensively. He opined that the current peace process focuses primarily on the vertical relations between the MILF and the GPH, which in a way impinges on the horizontal relationships between the different groups within the projected Bangsamoro area. These horizontal dynamics include questions on ownership and access regarding land and natural resources between, among others, the Teduray-Lambangian-Dulangan and other indigenous peoples (IP) and the Moro groups within the proposed Bangsamoro entity. Moreover, addressing the problems between the state and the Moro peoples has resulted in an impingement on the ability of the various non-Islamized indigenous peoples to directly access the state (as in the case of IPRA non-implementation in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the open question of the legal status of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) in the future Bangsamoro).

Atty. Gatmaytan emphasized the importance of looking at these '*horizontalities*' to consider the realities of the different groups in the proposed Bangsamoro area as well as the existence of multiple legal systems (legal pluralism) which are invoked conditionally and contextually by the different groups.

The following summarizes the flow of discussions among participants from civil society and academic institutions, IP organizations and government agencies.

What can be the foundational myth as a unifying symbol and unifying discourse among the stakeholders in the Bangsamoro political entity? For the Philippines, one foundational myth that most people can subscribe to is the idea that because of the anti-colonial struggle against Spain and the United States, the Philippine Republic was born. What the different groups in the Bangsamoro political entity need is a similar unifying discourse, a set of symbols and metaphors that is inclusive enough and which most people can buy into.

One possible foundational myth that could be explored is the story of Mamalu and Tabunaway, the two brothers of whom the latter decided to convert to Islam and adopt Islamic law, while the other brother wanted to maintain local or indigenous identity and culture. They agreed to remember who they are, that they came from the same root, and to respect each other to avoid conflict. This is one way of framing the relations between at least two of these peoples engaged in the current process.

The problem with any myth is that there are different ways to interpret it, especially since it is being invoked by both the IP groups and the MILF. Some interpretations say that such myth is in fact an admission of the Moro hegemony over the Tedurays-Lambangian-Dulangan and other IP groups. Another interpretation is that the story reflects mutual respect and mutual territory. For the IP groups, they are admitting that they are brothers who decided to separate ways, not only of space, but of practices, religion and identity.

But since the myth on Mamalu and Tabunaway is one of identity, it is not unifying but rather exclusive towards other groups (e.g. Christian settlers). They defined their identity which then limited their relationship as peoples. They defined who embraced Islam and who remained non-Islamized.

Another way of looking at myths is that they were still very much connected to the nation's concept of first modernity, which is one nation, one state, one people. The Philippines is in fact a pluralistic and multi-cultural nation. How could this also be acknowledged within the Bangsamoro entity?

The challenge now is on how to revive and reinterpret a foundational myth that is more inclusive and more politically progressive, and which celebrates brotherhood rather than separation. But as with any other myth being shared, this will always be susceptible to competing interpretations.

IPs 'accelerated' sense of alienation and abandonment by the state. With the signing of the last annex to complete the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, some IP groups in the Bangsamoro area had strongly expressed their feelings of exclusion due to government's neglect especially regarding the non-implementation of IPRA in the current Autonomous Region. With everything else moving forward, the national government (and Congress) should see this as an important point to be addressed in the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

With their different view on the concepts of territory and ancestral domain, these IP groups are anxious about how territory was interpreted in the peace negotiations. Thus, they suggest if the Bangsamoro Transition Commission or the Congress can include in the BBL a separate chapter focusing on the IP cause.

The “chicken metaphors” (*usapang manok*) repeatedly used by both indigenous and Moro groups (in this case during a focus group discussion in South Upi) capture some of these sentiments of anxiety:

Maguindanaon: *“Huwag muna natin pag-usapan ang paghahati-hati ng manok, ang isipin natin kung paano hulihin 'yon.”*

(“We should not discuss yet about how the chicken will be shared, we should catch it first.”)

Teduray: *“Iba ang manok ninyo, iba ang manok namin.”*

(“Our chicken is different from yours.”)

Confidence-building measures between the Bangsamoro and the IP groups. As the new political entity enters into the realm of state building, confidence-building measures among the groups inside the Bangsamoro should be given priority. This includes the clarification on what the MILF and Bangsamoro people intend to do in addressing the question of land and natural resources inside the projected entity. The peace negotiations only addressed the relationship between the state and the Bangsamoro in resource sharing but did not clarify on the horizontal conflicts involving land ownership and equitable access to the region's resources.

On the other hand, while the national government implements peace agreement with the MILF, it should not abrogate its responsibilities with the indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro area, which includes ensuring the implementation of IPRA (or an equal protection of indigenous rights) in the context of the Bangsamoro Basic Law).

Another “chicken metaphor” shared by an IP leader during the Peace Lens RTD may help to express the need for such confidence-building measures:

Maguindanaon: *“Hulihin muna 'yong manok bago pag-usapan. Kung sino yung makakakuha ng hita, mas magandang parte.”*

(“We try to catch first the chicken before we decide. Whoever gets the legs will get better share”).

Teduray: *“Mahirap 'yan kapag nahuli na 'yong manok, hindi namin alam baka balahibo na lang ang maiwan para sa amin; wala ng laman, wala pang buto.”*

(“We think it will be unfair for us. We are not sure what will be left for us, maybe the feathers only, without any meat and without bones”).

Premise of the aspirations of the IP groups is similar with that of the Bangsamoro. It is recognized that each group has its own agenda and interest. The idea is to settle, not to fall back on the reality of this conflict. What would be the unifying factor? What structure and system would be set up to let the groups co-exist peacefully, without sacrificing the rights of one group and at the same time the political settlement for another group. When one really considers the situations of the IPs, it can be considered that the premise of their aspirations is identical with that of the Bangsamoro: self-determination and assertion of identity, ethnicity, belief system and way of life. Despite similar aspirations, the government's response has been differential. One group has been privileged with the peace agreement while the other fears that its rights could actually be diminished vis-à-vis the status quo and the situation in areas outside the proposed Bangsamoro territory.

Bangsamoro as a unitary concept. A way to make the term 'Bangsamoro' more inclusive is encouraged. The Bangsamoro struggle is directed against a unitary system so it is apt to look for a framework that will include other communities who do not necessarily subscribe to Bangsamoro identity but are present in the area, rather than creating another unitary "sub-state" layer.

Historical dynamics of land ownership. It has been shared several times that it was the Tedurays-Lambangian-Dulangans who originally own large areas in Maguindanao before the 1970s war. When they went back to their areas after the war, they found the Maguindanaons inhabiting their territories. IP groups also shared about the sacred peace agreements in the past by their ancestors which delineated/defined their territories. How to deal with these multiple claims over an area once the Bangsamoro government has been set up? Would the future Bangsamoro government legalize Moro claims over these territories?

Video of Atty. Gatmaytan's talk available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mOywOs5WdA>

Prepared by forumZFD Philippines, contact details for inquiries:
domes@forumzfd.de, betita@forumzfd.de