The Politics of Labeling Philippine Muslims[*]

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In context

The paper seeks to situate the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the current symbol of Muslim insurgency in the Philippines, one of the longest struggles against colonialism and imperialism within a context of Muslim-Christian dynamics, focusing primarily on issues of discourse and terminology. Since 9/11, the Philippine government has had to balance its membership in the anti-terrorist "Coalition of the Willing," while pursuing an internal peace initiative with the Moros and ensuring that it does not alienate its sizeable Muslim citizenry.

The Philippine government has precisely struggled with the question of how it should name its opponents. One way of displaying its participation in the Coalition is by labeling an internal opponent "terrorist," such as the National Democratic Front (NDF), and thereby situating its internal struggle within the broader "Global War on Terror" (GWOT). While such a designation may earn the foreign approval of the Bush administration in Washington, internally, the "terrorist" tag would hinder peace negotiations, as it implies all-out-war. "Terrorist tagging" has already been used to downgrade and stigmatize those established rebel groups without a terrorist tradition[1], as seen with the communist New People's Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)[2]. Still, other anti-state groups in the Philippines such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) desire the terrorist tag, due to the high-profile media coverage that follows and their intention to have their acts and movements get public attention.

Discourse through portrayal is thus a tool for armed movements and a battleground (contested space) in contemporary conflicts. The purpose is to attain a victory of interpretation and ensure that a particular viewpoint triumphs. Certainly in Mindanao, words are presented as of equal power to bombs[3].

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[1] Interview of Atty. Soliman Santos, author of "The Moro Islamic Challenge"
[2] Because the MILF is undergoing peace negotiations with the government, the group is not being branded as a terrorist but is threatened to do so to deny links to the Al-Qaeda's Jemaah Islamiya
[3] Notes by Batia, Michael , St Anthony's, Oxford University

Unconscious or conscious tools used as "othering", labeling, or terrorist tagging in this case bode policy implications that also spill over to relationships between the internal populace and external actors. When used by the powerful such as the perceived superpower United States or the concerned state, it means defining a certain policy towards the labeled group. Terrorist tagging for instance is meant to threaten an anti-state actor to "mend its ways."

In the Philippine case, the tag is supposed to stop the flow of foreign funds and support to the rebel group and give the military green light to launch a sustained offensive.[4] Such policies also have implications on the relationships of Muslims and Christians, who are both citizens of the country case since labeling and lumping together rebel groups as those from a religious community such as the Muslims, alienates the Muslim community from supporting nationalist government goals and may even further support the Muslim independence initiative.

The Portrayal of Islam in the West and the Philippines

The 1979 Iranian revolution and the assassination of Egyptian head of state Anwar Sadat in 1981 dramatically illustrated the emergence of Islamist-oriented upsurges within highly frustrated socio-economic environments. Yet, these events eventually became the primary lens through which all Islamist movements were viewed. This displayed the limited vocabulary with which Islam is presented in the West, and the strong legacy that Said's Orientalism still plays in these representations[5].

Indeed, Kocher identifies two recurring themes in Western perceptions of the Islamic world: a belief that the global struggles of Muslims lack legitimacy as well as justice; and the immediate association of Islam with a political culture that is profoundly authoritarian and anti-democratic. The Islamic world has been consistently seen as alien and exotic and the causes fought for by the Muslims viewed as incomprehensible, which is why most Islamic political and social movements have not been able to capture the attention and sympathy of Western citizens[6].

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[4] Philippine Daily Inquirer editorial, May 15, 2003
[5] Said, Edward, Orientalism, New York: Vintage Books, 1979
[6] in paper presented in conference in Malaysia, Oct 7-9, 1995 on "Images of Islam,: Terrorising the Truth" JUST

Instead, the actions and ideology of Muslim extremists – the fundamentalists of the popular press – are seen to represent the entire body of Muslims. This has only increased in our post-Cold War age, where a perceived global threat of "fundamentalist Islam" has replaced the former bugbears of national liberation, ethno-nationalism and tribalism.

The images of political transformation that pro-Western Arab and Islamic autocratic regimes present to foreign observers only further blur the picture. From this undemocratic environment, reports from the heart of Muslim societies have not been transmitted through the media without being sensationalized, either internally or externally. The acts of a few politicized even criminal-intentioned – the bomber, kidnapper, even terrorist is headlined to be "Muslim" as identification of the doer in local media. Such is carried by international news agencies and even vise versa. Even when direct contact with Islamist figures is sought, they are chosen for the radicalism of their discourse or their exotic dress, not for their communication skills. Instead of using Muslim researchers or academics as source for opinion on issues affecting Muslims, media solicits views from the radical fringe of Muslim communities.

For instance, in the war on terror, Osama bin Laden has been made the symbol of anti-Bush rhetoric. The least repulsive expressions of Islamism are therefore systematically ignored or the multiplicity of voices within Muslim communities overlooked, replaced by the people viewed as more authentic that are seen to more closely correlate with the unconscious public expectations. When television journalism chooses to engage with Islamist movements, they often concentrate on its most frustrated fringes – the highly conservative peasants of remote rural areas in Egypt or those from Algerian suburbs expelled from university – without locating them in a broader and social context.

The authorized spokesmen of the Islamic movements, who can reduce these distances, are all too often viewed as too diplomatic and are dismissed when they do not conform to stereotypes. Still, within the Islamic world, the systematic internal media demonisation of Islamic opposition groups is partly mitigated by the activities of Islamic activists on the ground in mosques and through welfare associations and trade unions.

Long-standing revolutionary movements are threatened with being cast together with small home-grown groups, employing terrorist tactic. Such differentiation must be made clear in addressing policies towards two groups, though espousing the same Islamist agenda and yet have different traditions of violence. The danger of non-differentiation is that legitimate demands of more legitimate rebel groups can be ignored if lumped with bandit groups.

The Philippines is such case in point, where several Muslim anti-state groups are sometimes treated as one, under the label "Muslim." The Mindanao Muslim as savage is based on what Columbia University professor, the late Edward Said, would call the Cultural Other[7]. What separate the Spaniards, Americans and their Christian Filipino allies from the Moros, a derogatory Spanish label, are geography, religion and culture. It is a comparison of opposites between the Us and Them. The Spaniards referenced themselves in relation to who they are not[8].

So with the Americans in classifying the colonized natives when in 1926, Congressman Robert Bacon sponsored a bill creating two governments in the Philippines – one in Luzon and Visayas and another in Mindanao and Sulu. The bill was anchored on the belief: "The Moros are essentially a different race from the Filipinos, that for a hundred years, there has existed bitter racial and religious hatreds between the two and that complete union of the Filipinos under one government is distasteful to the Moros."[9]

Historiography and Nationalism in the Philippines

Islamic missionaries and traders had introduced the religion and a governance system based on the sultanates to the Philippines in 13th century. This society was then profoundly shaped with the arrival of the Spaniards and Catholicism in 1521, which informally divided the territory between the Christianized north and the resistant Islamic south. The north would eventually become identified as developed, advanced and oriented to the West; while the South - Moro, relatively backward, heathen, conservative and oriented towards the Middle East.[10] A colonial construct, the terming of Moros to encompass all Mohammedans of different sultanates, overlooked the territorial, cultural distinctions of the Muslim groups in the archipelago. A prejudice against the South was entrenched soon after the arrival of the Spaniards, when they employed the derogatory term 'Moro' to describe those uncivilized natives who refused to convert to Christianity and treated the corresponding region as a foreign territory. Sporadic wars between the Spanish, with their Filipinized colonial subjects and Moros from 1565 to 1898 were generally described as a fight against Moro pirates.

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[7] Said, ibid

[8] Concepcion, Richard, *Gracia Burnham and the Abu Sayyaf Revisited,* Master of Liberal Arts Graduate Project, the John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, May 12, 2003

[9] cited in Wadi, Julkipli's "*The Philippines and the Islamic World*," Foreign Service Institute, 1989

[10] Constantino, Renato, Mindanao Journal, Mindanao State University

Such perception of indigenous resistance carried over to the American period, whose pacification agenda for the created Moro Provinces was to "maintain law and order". American reports would usually refer to the Moros as outlaws, pirates, assassins, murderers, trouble makers and the like. Likewise, the Moros had a negative construct of the American government. Many Moros construed such government as a *gobirno a sarwang a tao* (government of a different people).[11] The Tribal Ward system was established to assimilate the "uncivilized tribes" into the mainstream of the colonial system.[12] The Philippine Commission created a Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes under the Department of Interior (headed by Worcester) which was renamed the Ethnological Survey for the Philippine Islands two years after its creation[13], tasked with a view to "learning the most practical way of bringing about their advancement in civilization and material prosperity."[14]

As a result, the non-Christian label (in fact, the words, civilized and Christians were spontaneously interchanged; so were non-Christian and wild) reappeared in several important laws, especially those affecting the ownership and distribution of land and those relating to special administrative structures.[15] A collection of American colonial photographs from the period shows the colonized natives acquiring their status through their intimate association (or clothing similarities) with male whites. These Northern natives stand in contrast with the Others – the unnamed native servants and the "wild uncivilized" Moros," who together with the Igorots and non-Christian tribes, occupy the bottom rung of the American classificatory grid where the main criterion for civilization was a belief in Christianity.[16] The legacy of this colonial past is still manifested in the representations by Philippine cultural festivals and secondary school textbooks of the Muslims in Mindanao. Moro-Moro a dramatic play and textbooks extol the Spanish conquest, their Christianization and their influence towards their Christianized Filipino allies. History books used in the secondary

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[11] Saber, Mamitua, The Majority-Minority Situation in the Philippines, Solidarity 10 (July-Aug, 1975): 36-46

[12] Dean Worcester, the Philippines: Past and Present, New York, Macmillan Company, 1914, Volume II, p 533

[13] Annual Report of the Philippine Commission, 1901 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1902), Part 1, p 38

[14] Rodil, B.R. , *A Story of Mindanao and Sulu in Question and Answer*, MINCODE, Davao City, Philippines, 2003

[15] Rodil, B.R, "The Lumads are Our People," in The Media and Peace Reporting: Perspectives on Media and Peace Reportage, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Pasig City, 2000

[16] May Datuin, The Native Gaze Returned in the Philippine American Contact Zone, paper presented in Writer's Workshop on Muslim Women, MSU, 2003 ; (Vergara: 1995)

public and private schools still propagate colonial prejudices, inaccurately portraying Islam and Muslim history and culture.[17]

Not only is the Moro degraded internally, but the role, position and voice of this population is either forgotten or degraded in Philippine historiography. Since those first Muslims arriving in the Philippines left almost no historical narrative, the task of writing the first history of the region went to the Spaniards. But a historian recognized that the Moros had the "most developed social organization"[18] with the pre-colonial Sultanates able to enter treaties with foreigners.

Later, Filipino historians focused exclusively on those events that occurred in the Christianized North. As revealed in the various histories of the revolt against the Spanish, nationalism was observed to be "reserved only for the Filipinos in the north in general but specifically attributed to the fighting (Christian) Tagalog and Pampango speaking communities." This historical monopoly was not shared with communities in other parts of the archipelago, although revolts and uprisings in those areas between the natives and the Spaniards were heavily documented.

The absence of Moros in mainstream Philippine literature is dramatic. Without any explanation, one Philippine historian states, "The Moro resistance cannot be called a part of the Filipino nationalist response to alien rule, the so-called Moro Wars are excluded from this book."[19] As another analyst argued, "I am quite intrigued and challenged by the seemingly deliberate exclusion of Moros as nationalists in several studies conducted on nationalism by historians and other scholars from Agoncillo to Zaide."[20]

Filipino nationalism, and the beginnings of a unified national identity vis-a-vis the Spanish, began to emerge with the attempts to break through the racial, educational, economic and social barriers imposed during the colonial process. Yet, as mentioned above, the position of the Moro in the nationalist movement was unclear. With Filipinism strongly equated with Christianity in the view of the Muslims, the Muslims found it difficult to accept their proposed identity as Filipinos. Today's Filipino historians, writers or intellectuals do not

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[17] Bula, Dalomabi Lao, "The Muslims in the Philippine Public and Private Secondary School History Textbooks: A Content Analaysis," special issue on the Shaping of Philippine History: Focus on Mindanao, Mindanao Journal (July-December 1992)

[18] Magdalena, Federico, "Ethnicity, Identity and Conflict: The Ethnogenesis of the Philippine Moro", Mindanao Journal (Vol. XXIV), 2001

[19] Mahajani: 1971 in Mindanao Journal

[20] http://www.cpcabrisbane.org/kasama/2004/vi8n2/colonialname4/htm

mention the fact that Claro M. Recto, the great Filipino nationalist, was the author of the "Colonization of Mindanao Act."[21]

The dilemma of Filipinism as a unifying concept was further aggravated by the fact that the ambiguities of ethno-religious origin were unresolved by the rime of the 1935 Constitution. The absence of a common national language – hindered by diverse ethnic languages and growing popularity of English – contributed to the cultural gap between Christians and non-Christians. Still, the 1935 Constitution did begin to sow the seeds of Filipinism by declaring that the Philippines would be a republican state and that the Christians and non-Christians were co-equal and parallel in importance.[22]

Muslims, Moros or Filipinos?

It is important to explore the terms used over the course of this conflict (Moro, Bangsa Moro, Muslim and Filipino), as the interpretation and evolution of the Bangsamoro issue is a significant factor. While a group of Muslims resurrected the concept of a Muslim struggle/nation as an antithesis to Filipinism in the late 1920s, the term "Moro" continued to be internally stigmatized until the late 1960s. The term's pejorative connotations were summarized in the General Wood's statement that "the only good Moro is a dead Moro."

In a conference organized by the Muslim Association of the Philippines in the 1950s to unite the Muslims, the word Moro was rejected as unacceptable.[23] A decision was made to use the term Bangsa Moro or Muslim to designate these ethnic communities (including all the Cordillera tribes and the Lumad hilltribes), which was formalized under the National Cultural Communities under Republic Act 1881. With such law, which also created the Commission on National Integration (CNI) in 1957, the Philippine government decreed that "non-Christian Filipinos" would henceforth be called the National Cultural Communities.

In order to erase the social stigma that came with the "tribal" label, the Constitution of 1973 and 1987 introduced the terms cultural communities and indigenous cultural communities,[24] and even the autonomous regions. An office called the Office on Muslim Affairs was created in the 1970s to serve Muslim communities all over the country. Previously, Senator Ahmad Alonto in 1950 has started using the term "Muslim" to refer to all Muslim citizens. Still, even this Muslim label is unsatisfactory as it consolidates thirteen specific ethno-linguistic

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[21] http://www.moroinfo.com/ch5.puppetry_in_the_mking.htm

[22] Tan, Samuel, Islam in the Philippines, University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 1995

[23] Abbas, Macapanton, "Is a Bangsamoro State within a Federation a Solution," 48 Ateneo Law Journal (Philipines), 2003, p 290

[24] ibid

groups in Mindanao. This type of labeling explains the mistrust of Muslims against their portrayal in mainstream media and literature. A nuanced explanation would showcase a diverse Muslim populace such that the experiences of a Moro in one province cannot be equated with that of another.

Within the Mindanao society, an individual is recognized primarily for his ethnic affiliation rather than religion. Even today, a Maranaw, a fellow Muslim Filipino, is as foreign and frightening to a Sama as is a Christian Filipino. Many Moros currently define themselves as non-Filipinos according to a 1993 study[25] which showed that 61% of a Muslim sample did not consider themselves as Filipino citizens. An earlier study (1946) among Moro college students indicate a higher rate of rejection at 89. 4 percent; they preferred to be called Moros or Muslims rather than Filipinos. However among themselves they identified their groups as Tausugs, Maranaos, Maguindanaos etc.[26]

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)'s establishment in the late 1960s was the beginning of a process to uplift the term "Moro". The MNLF viewed the term as a symbol of being "unconquered" by foreigners. Indeed, the expression "Moros, not Filipinos" demonstrates the MNLF interpretation of the Filipino as similar to "foreign colonizers," like the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese. The term had active political and militant connotations, whereas the word Muslim was seen to be religious and thus passive.

Indeed, the MNLF broadened the use of the word (to include Christians and hilltribes), using it to apply and to incorporate those groups: who resisted Western colonizers in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan; who asserted their right for self-determination; who were being oppressed; and who sympathized with the Moro plight.[27] The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has established the following definitions and terms, establishing the "Bangsamoro people" as the "native inhabitants composed of Islamized ethnic groups, highlanders, lumads and other non-Muslims with Bangsamoro ancestry and those who have been born, raised and educated in the Bangsamoro homeland, signifying and declaring legally their being Bangsamoro members."[28]

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[25] Magdalena, Federico, Ethnicity, Identity and Conflict: The Ethnogenesis of the Philippine Moro, Mindanao Journal (Vol. XXIV), 2001
[26] Note by Magdalena, Federico
[27] Tawagon : 1998
[28] Position paper by the MILF Technical Working Group on 6 Clustered Agenda Items," published in Kasarinlan 2000

The historical roots and contemporary causes of the recurrent Moro armed struggle are part of the institutional memory or organizational culture of the Moro liberation fronts.[29] The mainstream establishment would see the rebel fronts as a part of a bigger peace and order problem. Other analysis cite the historically powerless position of the minority vis-à-vis the majority, with this aggravated by previous policies of internal migration (Christians moving from north to the south) and displacement. While some view the Moro problem within the framework of social constructivist communication theories, Marxist critical theories and postcolonial discourse, others argue that the key problem is the maintenance of Filipino colonial rule.[30]

The MNLF, MILF, Bangsamoro Liberation Organization and Muslim intellectuals, however, do maintain, that if the Philippine government truly wants to solve the so-called Moro problem, it must exert an honest-to-goodness effort to understand the feelings, sentiments, biases, ideals, prejudices, customs, traditions and historical experience of the Bangsa Moro, as enunciated or articulated by the Moros themselves.[31] A real effort in cultural interpretation must be made, in order to solve the "communication gap" between the Muslim and Christian Filipino communities. Both interpret key documents (such as the Philippine Constitution and Tripoli Agreement) in different manners, particularly with respect to upholding identity and territorial rights. The contest over terminologies has continued since the MILF entered into peace negotiations with the government in 1997. The language of peace negotiations can actually become technical or legalistic with terms like status of belligerency, ancestral domain, or reference to certain international laws like the Geneva Convention and Protocol One.[32]

Naming the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

The 1968 Jabidah massacre and the Philippine claim to Sabah islands brought about a new surge of militancy among Muslim youth. The former incident, where young Muslim army recruits were allegedly massacred for not following orders to attack Muslim Sabah galvanized Muslim-led rallies and even triggered the MNLF's formation. In 1984, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

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[29] Guiam, Rufa Mae, "Telling the Truth of the Other: Images of Islam and Muslims in the Philippines", The Media and Peace Reporting: Perspectives on Media and Peace Reportage, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Pasig City, 2000

[30] http://www.comcentrum.ph/knowledge/Foras/knowledge-for a-commonpeace-commonalities =Excerpts from Soliman M. Santos, Jr. Political Values, Beliefs, Practices, pp. 1-38, UNESCO-AIJC 2001.

[31] Abbas, Datu Jamal Ashley, "Hermeneutic Interpretation of the Bangsa Moro Issue," at http://jamalabbas.virtualve.net/hermeneutic_Moro.htm (last accessed Aug. 20, 2003)

[32] Jose, Doreen , "Reporting Negotiations," in the Media and Peace Reporting: Perspectives on Media and Peace Reportage, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Pasig City, 2000

(MILF) broke from MNLF, as the MILF sees itself as an Islamist revolutionary organization and refuses to follow the MNLF's acceptance of autonomy as the ultimate solution to the Moro/Muslim problem. As MILF chairperson (now deceased) Salamat Hashim wrote, "Any solution (to the Mindanao problem) less than full independence of the Bangsamoro Muslims will not work."[33] The MILF asserts an even longer history, arguing that it was formed in reaction to the 1898 Treaty of Paris which "illegally included the unconquered Bangsamoro homeland to the American government."[34] The MILF calls itself the "Islamic movement spearheading the Jihad in the Bangsamoro homeland,"[35] and claims that it is the "sole representative of the Bangsamoro people." As such, the MILF can be seen as an Islamist revolutionary organization, as contrasted to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which accepted autonomy as the framework of governance for the Muslim minority.

The military identifies the MILF as one of three major threats to the state's internal security along with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front and the Abu Sayyaf Group. A National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP) document on international terrorists calls the MILF a "main secessionist rebel group,"[36] with the Department of National Defense (DND) calling the group as a secessionist group or separatist group. Despite military suspicion of suspected links to the "terrorist" Jemaah Islamiya, the government has been careful to exclude the MILF from its list of terrorist organizations, unlike the CPP classified under a US list as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO).

The non-labeling of the MILF is to prevent antagonizing them and bring them in peace negotiations. It is also partly due to the recognition of the Bangsamoro minority struggle by the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which has identified the Bangsamoro minority issue as an important one. Given this, the organization has achieved a more respectable standing compared to the Abu Sayyaf, which is classified as a terrorist group, and sometimes referred to as a bandit group or criminal gang.

Terror-listing by the United States implies being alienated from legal transactions and recognition. The law makes it illegal for people in the US or subject to US jurisdiction to provide material support to the foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) and requires US financial assistances to block its assets. It

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[33] Salamat Hashim, The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His objectives and Responsibilities, (Mindanao, Bangsamoro Publications), 1985, p 51
[34] Al Haj Murad, Jihad, In Defense of Islam and the Bangsamoro Homeland, Agency for Youth Affairs, 2001
[35] ibid
[36] in NDCP website

also provides a basis for the United States to deny visas to representatives and members of the FTOs.[37]

Peace talks can positively improve the public image of rebel organizations, as they are made to appear rational, level-headed and flexible and are seen to engage in reasoned argument rather than the rhetoric of violence.[38] However, in contrast, the Filipino and centralized-controlled media and educational source have tended to strengthen Muslim fears that they may have no place in the Filipino national community, leaving a belief that their only hope for the future lies in their identification with the Muslim world.[39]

Some media groups use "Moro when they mean Moro Islamic Liberation Front," revealing the press' use of "labeling and pejorative words." As argued by Hidalgo, "Many of the country's broadsheets have this irritating habit of using words like Moro, Muslim, MILF, interchangeably to refer to MILF fighters. This attitude could be a manifestation of bias against the MILF and the Moros. Or it could be plain and simple ignorance."[40]

In a study by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) of 1,633 articles of the five main Philippine broadsheets, only 20 may be classified as containing background material on the government-Moro rebel conflict.

Recommendations

Perhaps there is a need to explore the possibilities of reviving Senate bills Number 1867 by then Senator Ramon Revilla and 1377 by Senator Robert Barbers prohibiting the use of the words, "Muslim" or "Islamic" in print and broadcast media to describe any convicted of any crime or unlawful act. The argument against these is that they may curtail the freedom of speech and expression. Arguments to support such that:

- "associating a person's religious belief with criminals is inconsistent with its true meaning.' (Revilla)
- the fact is that people who murder, kidnap, steal or commit any criminal act do so independent of their religion and sometimes even contrary to its teachings (Commissioner Mehol Sadain, former professor, UP Institute of Islamic Studies)
- such practice hampers understanding, unity peace and development in this country, particularly Southern Philippines (Revilla)

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[37] Philippines Star report
[38] Al Haj Murad, ibid
[39] Tan, Samuel Three Wars and a President, Kasarinlan, University of the Philippines, 2000
[40] CC Hidalgo, Covering Mindanao, 2003

- such references make it more difficult for educators to rectify the misconceptions engendered by a history of widespread and institutional internecine warfare that characterized past Muslim-Christian relationship in the Philippines. (Sadain)

There are also a need to revisit and examine Civil Code provisions which refer to Muslims as "Muhammedans" and the Cultural communities as "pagans" (Nash Maulana, Inquirer correspondent). Such creates a misnomer inherited from "othering" by then colonial America. We recall the Holmes doctrine of 1919 or the Clear and Present Danger Rule on the use of words in the world of free speech. It put a stop to naming, referring or calling a group or groups of people by their racial colors, like the "red man" (referring to Indians) or the black man referring to American Negroes. Holmes wrote: "The question in every case is whether the words are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about substantive evil that Congress has right to prevent."

Media and academe need to be oriented on the "correctness" of concepts about Islam i.e. jihad, five pillars, Jesus and Muhammad etc. and that a realistic picture of the Muslims, considering the varied thirteen ethno-linguistic groups and coverts are presented in educational materials and media. Academic institutes dedicated to Islamic, Middle Eastern culture (i.e. Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, UP Institute of Islamic Studies) and Southern Philippines with publications as output can be useful in educating important officials of institutions i.e. AFP, Philippine National Police, Department of Foreign Affairs etc. Colleges of law should also consider offering Shariah and Muslim culture as courses with conscious hiring of competent Muslim faculty. Exchange of papers, students and faculty between Islamic and Mindanao institutes and Manila-based academic and official institutions would facilitate fruitful partnerships.

Media led by the Philippine Press Institute and Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP) (aided by UNESCO, academic institutes i.e. Center for Community Journalism, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility) ought to give equal space to positive stories among Muslim and in Mindanao. For media to give space to victims and of rebel-military conflicts and civil society formations and work in the island. We note the covenant of the 2002 Mindanao Media Summit, entitled "This is our Mindanao" which states: "We want reshape and redirect the themes on Mindanao currently dominated by terrorism, war criminality, and other forms of violence, to one that presents a realistic, balanced and truthful reporting of the lives, initiatives, relationships, issues pains, dreams and triumphs of our people. We believe that ethnic and religious biases, the elitist framework of reportage that consistently gives voice to the powerful; the focus on events rather than on processes deter us from achieving our goal…."

Professor Rufa Mae Guiam suggests those who report on the Mindanao peace process need to go back to the historical background of the Muslim Christian conflict. They need to examine not only one source, but all possible source of information about the circumstances that engendered the war in Southern Mindanao. Doing so will help the journalists ask sensitive and intelligent questions when they interview informants from both sides of the conflict. In addition, the journalist must read up on the various cultures of the thirteen Muslim ethno-linguistic groups, as no two groups are the same, even if some speak mutually intelligible languages. Similarly, regarding the terminology used, there is a need to be highly conscious of the distinctions of terms denoting religious identity and those used to refer to cultures or groups of people.[41] Reporters need to know when to use the word Muslim and cultural terms like Maguindanaon. More importantly, they should be careful when describing people who are criminal suspects, avoiding mentioning an individual's religion as this may serve to create more divisions in an already fragmented society. The media's vital role in promoting peace was recognized by the UNESCO. As proposed by the Assistant Director General for Information and Communication, "I am most convinced that media have an enormous capacity for not only bridging the gap between different cultures by sharing information and cultivating dialogue but also promoting mutual knowledge and better understanding in society."[42] Telling the truth about the "other" requires introspection and self-examinations of prejudices, biases and "moral frontiers."[43]

Finally, it is urged that there must be an active response and initiative from Muslims themselves in a public relations campaign to clarify misconceptions and stereotypes through academic for a, media appearances and advertising, business and tourism partnerships etc.

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[41] ibid

[42] Address by Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO Assistant Secretary General on "Terrorism and Media" rendered during the World Press Freedom Day held in Manila, May 1, 2002

[43] Copin, Noel, "Only Truth Leads to Peace," keynote address delivered at the 17th World Congress of the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) in Graz, Austria, 1995