

Mindanao Armed Conflict: Religious or Otherwise?

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Abstract

This study investigates and contests the labelling of the armed-conflict in Mindanao in the Southern Philippines as religious in nature. By historicizing the inception and evolution of the conflict, this study intends to make explicit the pertinent factors that are concealed in the process of labelling the conflict as religious. Furthermore, employing William Cavanaugh's deconstructive contestation of the very idea of religion, this essay aims at destabilizing the essentialistic tendency to regard religion as a violent entity.

Introduction

Is the armed conflict in Mindanao in the Southern Philippines religious in nature? Several authors either explicitly or implicitly suggest that it is. In "The Religious and Social Motivations behind Islamic Insurgencies in the Philippines," Chun Yin Yeung identifies the Muslim's intent to please Allah and strengthen their relationship with Him by making His Word supreme and to politically assert their rights and freedom for self-determination with the purpose of establishing a state that imposes the Shariah Law as the underlying religious reasons of the separatist groups' struggle with the Philippine government.¹In "Causes of Terrorism: The Philippine Case," Samira Gutoc accentuates that the rise of separatist groups in Mindanao is influenced by religious fundamentalist ideologies.²While acknowledging its multifaceted aspects, Maria Vivod, in "Multiple Layers of the Conflict in Mindanao," conjectures that the long-standing religious rivalry between Christians and Muslims in the country worsens the Mindanao problem.³Also, in "Cause of Conflict Between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao," Victor posits that the violent religious traditions, which he readily associated with Islam, exacerbate the conflict.⁴Contrary to what these

¹ Chung Yin Yeung, "The Religious and Social Motivations behind Islamic Insurgencies in the Philippines." Unpublished Material. UK: Salford University, 2014.

https://www.academia.edu/18058908/Religious_and_Social_Motivations_behind_Islamic_Insurgencies_in_the_Philippines [accessed November 22, 2017]: 2.

²Samira A. Gutoc, "Cause of "Terrorism": The Philippine Case", in *Arellano Law and Policy Review* 4.1 (July 2003): 60-61.

³Maria Vivod, "The Multiple Layers of Conflict in Mindanao,"

https://www.academia.edu/28449836/THE_MULTIPLE_LAYERS_OF_CONFLICT_IN_MINDANAO[accessed November 22, 2017]: 7.

⁴ Victor, "Cause of Conflict Between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao, Part 1 (July 2005)," unpublished material.

researchers held, however, this paper argues that associating of religious beliefs to causing the conflict, the correlating of religious affiliations to violence, the essentializing tendencies to regard religion as an inherently violent entity, and the linking of political ideologies to “religion” are but reductionist interpretations of the conflict’s complex history. We contend that them is reading of the Mindanao conflict is mainly due to either an apparent misinterpretation of its history and/or an uncritical and credulous confidence and on the contested idea—religion.

To prove that the Mindanao conflict is other than religious, this investigation involves two tasks. To bring more clarity to the inception and development of the conflict, the first task engages the scholarly work of several authors in an attempt to historicize the armed struggle between the Islamic separatist groups and the Philippine government. Subsequently, in order to unravel the mistaken entanglement between religion and violence, the second task employs William Cavanaugh’s critical contestation of the very idea, “religion.”⁵The paper makes use of Cavanaugh’s insights on the contested idea of religion in order to make explicit the quiet remnants of a deeply rooted Spanish colonial Christianization project that is tacitly implicated in the ongoing conflict.

<http://www.iiipeace.org/Philippines%20Causes%20of%20Conflict%20between%20Christians%20and%20Muslims.htm> [accessed December 08, 2017]: 1-2.

⁵William Cavanaugh, a professor of DePaul University, is a renowned theologian in the twenty-first century. He has major contributions in political theology, economic ethics, and ecclesiology.