

Some Notes on the Bangsamoro Armed Struggle Against U.S. Imperialism in Mindanao and Sulu

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"We must obey our blood and occupy new markets and if necessary new lands. American factories are making more than the American people use, American soil is producing more than they can consume"

Sa mga salitang ito na binigkas ni dating senador Albert Beveridge nasasaklaw ang interes ng Amerika sa Pilipinas, partikular sa lupain ng Bangsamoro.

Sa papel na ito ipinakikilala ang mga Bangsamoro at tinatalakay ang ilang pangunahing kaso ng kanilang mahigit dalawampung pag-aaklas laban sa mga Imperyalistang Amerikano. Ang kanilang pag-aaklas ay bunsod ng pangangailangang bigyang proteksyon ang minana na ni ang lupain. Ang lupain na ito ang pinilit ng Estados Unidos na mapamahalaan at makamkam. Binibigyang pansin din sa mga talatang napapaloob dito ang mga negatibong epekto ng Imperyalismong Amerikano sa pamantayang pang-ekonomiya at politika ng mga Bangsamoro.

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"The Forces of American colonialism came like a thief in the night, bearing death and destruction, frustrating the Filipino aspiration for national freedom and cutting short the glorious struggle of the Moro and the Igorot peoples to remain free..."

-B.R. Rodil

THIS PAPER HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE OUTSTANDING CASES OF THE Bangsamoro armed Resistance to U.S. imperialist aggression in the Bangsamoro homeland and likewise, present some of the negative consequence of the U.S. imperialism on the Bangsamoro economy and politics.

Who are the Bangsamoro people? Historically, the Bangsamoro people comprise the thirteen (13) Islamized ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan which include the following;

Badjao	Maguindanao
Sangil	Iranun (also known as Ilanun)
Maranao	Tausug
Jama Mapun	Molbog
Yakan	Kalagan
Palawani	Kalibugan
Samal	

Recently, however, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in its official designation of the Bangsamoro nationality includes not only the thirteen (13) Islamized natives of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan but also the Lumads tribes and even Christian Filipino also are sympathetic to their struggle for self-determination.

Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan until their incorporation into the Philippine Republic and the subsequent arrival of the Filipino migrant settlers from Luzon and the Visayas in 1912 and thereafter, have always been the ancestral homeland of the more than 30 ethnolinguistics groups, 13 of which are what compose the Bangsamoro people. The other groups are the non-Muslim and non-Christian inhabitants of the Islands. They are now popularly referred to as the *Lumad* of Mindanao.

The Bangsamoro people (Muslim) however, only constitute about 20% of the entire population of the Bangsamoro homeland¹ They are dominant only in the five provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi and also, in some municipalities of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao del Norte, Davao del Sur and Palawan.

SOME OF THE OUTSTANDING CASES OF THE BANGSAMORO ARMED RESISTANCE AGAINST THE U.S. IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION IN MINDANAO AND SULU

While the Bangsamoro people were beginning to reconstruct their society and recover from the brutal and cruel war of Spanish colonial aggression, the American imperialists came in 1898. Compared to their Spaniard predecessor, the U.S. imperialist were not only determined but also more advanced politically, technologically, economically and militarily. Before their display of their superior might and fresh vitality, the weary, flogging and worn-out resistance of the Bangsamoro people gave way. However, this happened only after a decade of bloody fighting and heroic struggles against the more shrewd and calculating Americans.²

In order to put the discussions of the Bangsamoro armed struggle against U.S imperialism in a proper historical perspectives, let us review the basic motive of the Americans in coming to the Philippines in general and to Mindanao and Sulu in particular.

The basic motive of the Americans in coming to the country is concretely revealed in the following statement made by the U.S. Senator Albert Beveridge to a Boston audience.

"We must obey our blood and occupy new markets and if necessary new lands. American factories are making more than the American people can use, American soil is producing more than they can consume."³

The U.S. interest in the Bangsamoro homeland must therefore be seen within the context of their imperialist intention of making the islands as source of raw materials, dumping grounds

for surplus and unwanted finished products and outlets of investments of their excess capitals.⁴ The U.S. capitalists also intended to use the islands jump-off points for reaching Asia's lucrative market.⁵

With their Sultans who neither stayed neutral or supported the American colonial government, the secondary leadership among the Bangsamoro society, represented by the *Datus*, the *Maharadjas*, the *Panglimas*, and the *Ulangkayas*, took the cudgel of leading the Bangsamoro people in their struggle against the U.S. imperialism.

There are more or less 20 recorded armed resistance to American military aggression in Mindanao and Sulu from 1903 to 1934. However, the paper will highlight only three popular armed resistances from among the major Bangsamoro groups: the Maguindanao, Maranao and the Tausug.

**THE MAGUINDANAO ARMED STRUGGLE:
THE CASE OF DATU ALI OF KUDARANGAN, COTABATO
(1899-1905)**

The most outstanding armed resistance from among the Maguindanao Bangsamoro was led by Datu Ali. Datu Ali, the son of Datu Uto, was recognized as the most popular leader of the Maguindanaos after Sultan Kudaran. Datu Uto was one of the fiercest enemies of the Spanish colonial government. Ali was also a son-in-law of Datu Piang, a Maguindanao chieftain, who took over the Maguindanao leadership from Datu Uto.⁶

Immediately after the last of the Spanish colonial forces evacuated from Cotabato in 1899, Datu Ali, along with Datu Diambangan filled the power vacuum left behind by the colonizers. Datu Alin strongly refused to recognize the anti-slavery law imposed by the Americans. He attempted to rally the entire Cotabato Valley to fight the new enemies. He even called his trusted leaders to persuade the Maranao Bangsamoro in the Lake Lanao region to join him in his struggle against U.S. imperialism.⁷

Unfortunately, in October 1905, Datu Ali was killed and defeated by his enemies. However, until his death he

remained steadfast in his refusal to submit to American sovereignty.⁸

Remarkably, the American success and victory over Datu Ali and his armed followers, cannot solely be attributed to their modern technology and military might but also to their very effective "divide and rule strategy and tactics."⁹

The American imperialist employed the followers of Datu Piang, who they earlier won over to their side, to get Datu Ali. Piang reportedly provided "vital information to American troops resulting in the suppression of the revolt, the death of Datu Ali and several *datos* who supported the uprising."¹⁰

The American liked Datu Piang, who had allowed his slaves to join the First Cotabato Company, also known as the Moro Company of the Philippine Constabulary, in 1904. According to the American military reports, these "Cotabato Moro Constables, who were well-versed in the trails, tricks and traits of Ali subsequently provided the U.S. Army with valuable intelligence information and scouting services."¹¹

THE MARANAO ARMED STRUGGLE: THE CASE OF DATU AMPUAN AGAUS OF TARAKA, LANAOS (1903-1916)

The popular Maranao Moros armed struggle against the U.S. imperialist aggression in the Lake Lanao region was led by Datu Ampuan Agaus of Taraka. The armed resistance started in 1903 and lasted until 1916.

In 1903, General Pershing already enjoyed the sympathy and support of some local *datos*, like Datu Pedro, Datu Gamur and their respective followers. The American met the strongest resistance from the forces of Datu Ampuan Agaus. Their encounters culminated in the battle of Kutah Taraka where the Maranao freedom fighters suffered two hundred casualties. Later twenty nine surrendered to the American colonial forces including Ampuan Agaus.¹²

However, the surrender of Datu Agaus was merely a tactical move, for in 1906 he was up in arms again. After one decisive

encounter near Kutah Taraka, where once again he suffered heavy losses, Agaus wisely shifted his tactic into small-scale encounters, harassing American soldiers traveling overland from Iligan to Marawi.¹³

As a result, Agaus was able to make the situation so uncomfortable for the Americans. One U.S. General wrote in frustration that one could not cross the Keithly Road "without getting shot up"¹⁴ Despite the presence of a U.S. regimental post within the immediate area, Agaus was even able to lead an attack on Dansalan now Marawi in January 1908, nearly overwhelming a constabulary post. A month later, his warriors boldly ambushed a U.S. Infantry detachment and seriously wounded Allen Gard, the Governor of Lanao. With this, the U.S. were able to organize "a systematic campaign to explore, map, and expand the government's control of Lanao hinterland."¹⁵

In order to neutralize Agaus and his fighters and weaken their mass support, the U.S. imperialist forces "encircled the datu's domain and tried to force him into a decisive engagement or at least drive him into less familiar territory. Also secret service spies saturated the area."¹⁶

Bangsamoro constabulary contingents were tasked to go around the Lake Lanao region with a mission to explain the colonial government's program of peace and material progress to their fellow Bangsamoros. The same groups, the American reports said "did not hesitate to deal very harshly with those who did not respond." The psychological effect of the American divisive activities upon the morale of the Marapao anti-imperialist fighters and their mass supporters was very clear. The Bangsamoro constables "succeeded where the U.S. Army bullets failed," For within three months, 500 warriors surrendered with their rifles. And by the middle of 1916, Ampuan Agaus formidable anti-U.S. forces had disintegrated."¹⁷

THE TAUSUG ARMED STRUGGLE:

THE CASE OF PANGLIMA HASSAN OF SULU (1903-1904)

Among the Tausug of Sulu, the popular armed resistance to U.S. imperialist was led by Panglima Hassan. Although it lasted only for less than six months - from October 1903 to March 1904 - it

was serious enough to merit a massive military campaign by the Americans.¹⁸

Panglima Hassan did not belong to the datu class but had the respect and admiration of the Tausug community leaders, among them Panglima Dammang, Maharadja Indanan, Maharadja Opau, Datu Tallu, Datu Imlam, Datu Usap and Datu Bandahala who also had thousands of followers. He was a self-made man who rose from humble lineage through his leadership abilities. It was said that he could easily call 500 men to arms within an hour, and many times that figure in a day or two. Only two datu, Julkainan and Calbi could be counted as friendly to the Americans. The Sultan of Sulu was playing neutral.¹⁹

Sometimes in early November 1903, the first open assault on the American troops was started, when a military mapping expedition, escorted by two companies of the 17th Infantry and two troops of the 14th Cavalry was fired upon several times at the slopes of the Sulayman Mountain.²⁰ This firing, signaled the general uprising in Sulu. The first shots were fired by the men of Maharadja Andung and his four hundred men but no one doubted that the real leader of the uprising was Panglima Hassan who sent 40 riflemen to assist Maharadja Andung. Bangsamoro all over Sulu were up in arms and eager for a fight. By November 1903, Major Scott informed General Leonard Wood that the situation in Jolo was out of control. This triggered the launching of the second Sulu Expedition, a force consisting of about 1,500 men, under the leadership of General Wood himself. The whole command, in three columns, stretching over a front of about two and a half miles, marched inland on the morning of November 13, 1903.²¹

Hassan who expected a simple frontal attack was surprised by the American troops from various directions. The Tausug fighters engaged them in a hand-to-hand combat. The defenders sustained thirty dead and undetermined number of wounded at the end of the first day; and another fifty to sixty dead and more wounded casualties the following day. Hassan had to abandon his Kutah at Lubok. At another occasion, Hassan who was confirmed sick with fever by the Americans, pretended to surrender to Major Scott along with a dozen of his men. He then

requested to fetch his wife and children from his Kutah so that they may join him in Jolo. Major Scott with the same cavalry went along but as they rode into a swamp, Hassan sprang forward and disappeared into the concealed wall of a Kutah. Hassan's men greeted the American with a volley of rifle fire, hitting the major on both hands. Hassan escaped and continued his fight.²²

Nine days after, the Bangsamoro uprising was declared quelled and the main mission of the Second Sulu Expedition deemed completed. About 500 of the Sulu warriors were killed, wounded or captured, and their Kutahs destroyed. However, the principal leaders remained at large and defiant. It was left to Major Charles O Connor who replaced Scott to finish the job.²³

Hassan, enjoying the support of his family and Datu Laksamana, would continue his struggle for a few more months, moving his forces from one Kutah to another. Meanwhile, his allies and friends began to succumb to American pressure and one after another presented themselves to the Americans. Finally, on March 4, 1904, Hassan fell with twenty-three bullets in his body in his last Kutah fight at Bud Bagsak.²⁴

As in the case of Datu Ali and Datu Ampuan Agaus, Panglima Hassan's downfall was partly hastened by dwindling local support. The Sulu Sultan who showed no sympathy for Hassan's cause reportedly led 1,000 of his own men to apprehend the resistance leaders. Tausog mercenaries tipped off the Americans to Hassan's hide-out.²⁵

SOME OF THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE U.S. IMPERIALISM ON THE BANGSAMORO ECONOMY AND POLITICS

The U.S. rule in the Bangsamoro homeland was both brutal and subtle. The brutal and effective military campaign was complemented with education programs and economic development schemes. The colonial administration was there to "systematize" the whole process of colonization through landownership, land registrations, cadastral survey, homesteading and agricultural investment.²⁶ The effects of this systematic colonization was devastating. The resettlement programs was began in 1912 by U.S. imperialists. The natives of

Mindanao, both the Bangsamoro and the Lumads lost their ancestral land to Filipino Christian settlers and large U.S. corporations.

Asari in his speech entitled "Imperialist Conspiracy in the Bangsamoro Homeland," accurately describes the extent of the U.S. imperialists aggression into the Bangsamoro Society. He claims:

"No people or nation has been victimized and suffered so much from the conspiracy of the Imperialist force as represented by those evils we call multinational than in the Southern Philippines."²⁷

The resettlement programs in the Bangsamoro homeland was punctuated by the establishment of agricultural colonies or resettlements in Catobato, Lanao and Davao, Zamboanga and Agusan as early as 1919. The resettlement in Lanao was for the benefit of the American soldiers who were married to Filipinas and had no desire to go home to the U.S. These naturally displaced the Bangsamoro and the Lumad, who were pushed out of their ancestral land into the periphery, where social, political or economic development was hardly felt. Worse, they were given the remaining unproductive lands to till. This signalled the beginning of the socio-economic marginalization of the Bangsamoro and the Lumad.

The Filipino Christian settlers who took over the ancestral land of the Bangsamoro and the Lumad were actually victims of the agrarian unrest prevailing then in Luzon during that period. This agrarian unrest was the direct result of the U.S. imperialists' designs to exploit and control the economic resources of the archipelago. For instance, in Cotabato's Koronadal Valley alone, 97,000 hectares of lush grassland were given to these settlers in 1989.²⁹ The Luzon settlers were lured by the U.S. colonial government to go to Mindanao where they were given incentives and priority in the granting of landownership privileges.³⁰ They were being compensated for the loss of their land due to the monopolistic policies of the local elite and the U.S. Capitalists.³¹

The resettlement programs in the Bangsamoro homeland paved the way for the easy and massive entry of the Filipino

big landlords and U.S. capitalists, including the U.S. corporations thereby penetrating the Bangsamoro economy. The Filipino Christian settlers who previously cultivated their own lands, later found out that they had also lost their land holding through the bureaucratic maneuvers of the rich and powerful landlords as well as by U.S. Corporations.³² One of these U.S. corporations was BF Goodrich Company, which had rubber plantations in Basilan, since 1904 and in Cotabato after the second World War. Another U.S. Corporation was the Del Monte Company which had lands in Bukidnon since 1926.³³ Because of this trend, big tracts of land in the Filipino Christian resettlement areas went into the hands of a few elites and foreign investors. Lands owned by U.S. Corporations were soon planted to cash and other commercial products. Large scale production of export crops such as copra, abaca rubber, pineapple and sugarcane soon followed.³⁴

Gradually, the Filipino Christian settlers also suffered the same fate met by the Bangsamoro people and the Lumad. They were dispossessed of their private lands. Their individual private lots soon became part of the U.S. multinational corporation land holding.³⁵ This land grabbing problem brought serious social and political repercussion.

In the political arena, the U.S. imperialists made sure that the traditional Bangsamoro and the Filipino political leaders were amply trained and pampered to become their "sympathetic allies," a euphemism for collaborators. In talking about better ways of training and pampering the Bangsamoro and Filipino traditional leaders in order to subvert the people's resistance, Silva said:³⁶

"The pensionado program, the equivalent of today's scholarship grants, had more lasting effects. Under this program, sons and daughters of the Moro ruling elites, as well as also the case in the North, were sent for studies in the United State or Manila. Graduates came home with their stateside values, outlooks and beliefs. While the program constituted only a small portion of the public school system, it cannot be regarded lightly. For as envisioned by the American colonizers, this was part and parcel of the grand design to develop

American-oriented leaders from among us under the guise of training us for self-government. With this program, the colonizers in fact succeeded in softening our resistance to the American rule."

Gowing enumerates the following Bangsamoro political leaders who were the direct beneficiaries and the products of the American educational policy: Hadji Butu and Hadji Gulamu Rasul of Sulu; Datu Facundo Mandi of Zamboanga, and Alaoya Alonto of Lanao.³⁷

Aside from "pampering" and "educating" the Bangsamoro political leaders, the U.S. imperialists also implemented the policy of recruiting the "sympathetic" Bangsamoro into the colonial army to fight their fellow Bangsamoro. For instance, in 1904, the Moro company of the Philippine Constabulary was formed not only to fight but also to provide scouting services and intelligence information to the U.S. Colonial Army.³⁸

It in this light that the weakening of the Bangsamoro resistance against the U.S. imperialists can be best understood. Faced with compliance and life versus resistance and death, the majority of the Bangsamoro sultans chose their interests and compliance and life. With their leaders (sultans) either demoralize or acting as U.S. "collaborators," the Bangsamoro resistance now under the leadership of the secondary leaders like the Datus, Panglimas, Maharadjas and Ulangkayas lasted only for about a decade. In the end, the aforementioned leaders were defeated and colonized like the rest of the Filipino people.

NOTES

¹ 1981 Philippine Yearbook estimated that there were 4.5 million Bangsamoro. As for the Bangsamoro, the Moro Research Group cited 3 million, while the Institute of Islamic Studies at U.F. cited 5 million. Ibon Facts and Figures, No.76 (October 15, reported 2,504,233. The MNLF in its latest survey (1988) cited 8 million Bangsamoro Muslim and 5 million Lumad inhabitants of the Bangsamoro homeland.

² In spite of the military power of the U.S. imperialists, it was only after more than a decade of widespread resistance that they were able to subjugate the Bangsamoro people. See Gowing's *Mandate in Moroland; The American Government of Muslim Filipino, 1899-1920* (Quezon City; PCAS University of

- the Philippines, 1977), pp. 77-105 for the details of the American-Moro War.
- ³ T.S.J George. *Revolt in Mindanac: The Rise of Islam in the Philippines politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 45.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.
- ⁶ Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moronland; The American Government of Muslim Filipino, 1899-1920*, (Quezon City; PCAS, UP, 1977). p. 157.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Samuel K. Tan, *The Muslim Armed Struggle in the Philippines, 1900-1941* (Syracuse University, 1973), Ph. D. Thesis. p. 133.
- ⁹ B.R. Rodil, *A history of the Moro People and the Lumad Communities of Mindanao and Sulu in Questions and Answers, Morograph, 1998, (Part III). p. 6.*
- ¹⁰ Tan, 1993, p. 13 and also cited in Rodil, 1998, p. 6.11. G. Y. Coats, "The Philippine Constabulary in Mindanao and Sulu, 1903-1917," *Bulletin of American Historical Collection*, January, 1975, p.12. See also Rodil, *A History of the Moro...*, 1998 part III, p. 6.
- ¹² Tan, 1973, p.21.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, Coats, p. 16; also Rodil, *op. cit.*1998, p. 7.
- ¹⁴ Coats, *op. cit.* p. 17; Rodil, 1998 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ¹⁵ Samuel K. Tan, *The Filipino Muslim Armed Struggle, 1900-1972* (Manila: Filipinas Foundation, 1977), p. 22; Rodil, 1998 *Ibid.*... p. 7 Muslim Filipino; Heritage and Horizon (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979). p 172.
- ¹⁶ Coats, *op. cit.* p. 20.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; Rodil, p. 7.
- ¹⁸ Rodil, *op. cit.*(1998), p.7.
- ¹⁹ Col. Horace p. Hobbs, *Kris and Krag Adventures Among the Moros of Southern Philippine Islands*, privately printed, 1962. Pp. 97,98 and 99.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.95.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 99 and 100.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 101, 102.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-110.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-108; Coats, pp. 19-20.

- ²⁶ Moro Research Group. *"The Moro people's struggle for national self-determination* Unpublished Monograph, no date, p. 8.
- ²⁷ Abdurasad Asari, Representative of the MNLF, his speech at the OIL Workers Anti- Monopolistic World Conference, Tripoli, Libya, 26-30 March 1986. The Conference was sponsored by the General Trade Union of petroleum, petrochemicals and minerals of the Socialist people's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.
- ²⁸ Rad D. Silva, *Two Hills of the Same Land; Truth Behind the Mindanao Problem*. (Privately printed, 1978), pp. 35-40.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- ³⁰ George, 1980.p. 45.
- ³¹ Silva, *op. cit.* *Ibid.* , p 45.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ³³ Aijas Ahmad. *"Class and Colony in Mindanao; Political Economy of the National Questions,"* Unpublished manuscript, May- June 1980, p. 17.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Silva, *op. cit.* p. 24.
- ³⁸ Peter G. Gowing. *op. cit.* p. 172.
- ³⁹ Silva, *op. cit.* 1978, p. 18.