

# THE SYNCRETIC POLICY: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE POLITICAL ACTION REPertoire OF MNLF RETURNEES IN PALAWAN

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*This study attempted to identify the mode of political participation that former members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in two towns in Palawan indulge in after their reconciliation with the Philippine government. The main question addressed by this study is "how do the MNLF rebel returnees interact with the local government in relation to the formers' perceived role and benefit of a citizen?" This paper discusses the factors involving political efficacy such as economic values, political values, and demographic profile that affect the nature and extent to which the members of the group participate in the political process. The earnest cost-benefit consideration given by the respondents before involving in a political action was also identified. It was further recognized that the most pervading political value among the informants is the support for regime norms. This paper concludes that the former rebels have imbibed a policy of political syncretism that is incorporating more democratic tools of negotiation to their political participation scheme for the achievement of their group's objectives. This implies the imminent shift of the political action paradigm of the informants from dissident to conformist category.*

*Keywords: Political syncretism, political action repertoire, political participation*

## Introduction

Syncretism has been an enveloping concept in postmodern anthropology in discussions related to shifting identities, power struggle and the practice of culture. In recent decades the term has been extensively used in understanding the plight between religious revivalism and fundamentalism. Shaw and Stewart (1994:53) are supported by Kraft (2002:153) in defining religious syncretism as the "politics of religious synthesis." Svetamra (2007:5) reconceptualized syncretism as the "dynamic process of religious synthesis." The demarcation between the notions of the sacred and the profane, in this instance, has been made fluid. In this study, a similar perspective is presented with concentration on the political behavior of the informants. This paper primarily tackles the question how do the MNLF

rebel returnees interact with the local government in relation to the formers' perceived role and benefit of a citizen?

A form of political syncretism was observed to have been significant in the political participation and identity assertion of the Moro National Liberation Front rebel returnees. It is argued that the politics of engagement practiced by the informants have dramatically shifted from a mobilized form of political participation to an institutional one<sup>1</sup>. This displays a form of political syncretism practiced by the members of the group.

To further understand the political behavior of the members of the said group, a model on political action was devised. This model is an amalgamation of earlier models on political action<sup>2</sup> which highlights political efficacy, political values, demographic background, and economic values as factors affecting the political action and behavior of an individual, specifically for this study, an MNLF rebel returnee.

This study which is part of an earlier work<sup>3</sup> was conducted from May 2006 to January 2007 using participant observation, interview schedule, and focus group discussions.

Though the population of this study is generally limited to MNLF rebel returnees residing in the province of Palawan, for comprehensiveness, the respondents of this study were extracted from two populations of Muslims which are from Balabac Municipality, purposively representing the rural area, and those from Puerto Princesa City, representing the urban area. The informants apart from being once affiliated to the MNLF group were also selected in consideration of their age that is strictly from 18 years old<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> This model of political participation is popularly labeled as Gadi Wolfsfeld's Political Action Repertoire. Institutional political participation involves constitutionally-mandated forms of political action while mobilized form of political action involves mass-based movements and are often cited as illegal. (See Reference for full bibliographic citation)

<sup>2</sup> Read Gibson (1997); Hudson (1989); Muller, Opp, Kolsko (1987); Silver&Dowley (2000); Wolfsfeld (1986)

<sup>3</sup> *The Political Action Repertoire of Muslims in Palawan* (2007). A Master's thesis which attempted to peg the type of political participation of the members of the said group in reference to their demographic background, level of political efficacy, type of political values, and type of political action.

<sup>4</sup> It is believed that the children of the former MNLF members have been enculturated to the type of political action that is being practiced by their parents. They were included in this study to gauge whether the type of political participation that they are practicing is similar to the former practices of their parents or if their mode of participation has shifted already.

the legally dictated voting age, until to that which is considered as the retirement age.

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first provides a description of the site, the informants, and the history of their political participation. The second discusses the current trend in the type of political action among the informants in relation to their level of political efficacy and political values. The final section presents an evaluation of the current trend in the group's political participation and the political possibilities that may be expected in regard to these.

## **THE RETURNEES AND THEIR "NEWFOUNDLAND"**

### **The History of MNLF Struggle**

It can be said that the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front was essentially due to the Muslims' perceived inadequacy of the government to address their socio-economic and political needs. The angst of the Muslims was further heightened upon the imposition of Martial Law in 1972. President Marcos, upon the apparent insubordination of the Muslims on the South allowed for a series of attacks against the supposed camps of the rebels in the provinces of Lanao, Cotabato and other parts of Mindanao. Actions such as these have fortified the membership of a significant number of Muslims to the MNLF struggle (McKenna 2002:165-66).

The public declaration of the Bangsamoro National Identity was bannered in a manifesto released by the Moro National Liberation Front in April 28, 1974. It chiefly consisted of the protests and aspirations of the Moro people. An excerpt of that manifesto states

We, the five million oppressed Bangsamoro people, wishing to free ourselves from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism, which has caused us untold sufferings and miseries by criminally usurping our land, by threatening Islam through wholesale desecration of its places of worship and its Holy Book, and murdering our innocent brothers, sisters, and folks in genocidal campaign of terrifying magnitude...aspire to have the sole prerogative of defining and chartering our national identity in accordance with our own free will in order to ensure our future and that of our children (Santos 2001:56).

This declaration was but one of the explicitly defined acts of the Filipino Muslims in their search of national identity and recognition. Nur Misuari who acted as the chairman of the political group expressed in his speech in Algeria in 1977 that the struggle of the MNLFF is rooted in a historical-cultural foundation of the concept of Philippine Muslim Nationalism. McKenna (2002:207-8) quoted Misuari stating that "In keeping with the desires of the broad masses of our people, the MNLFF adopted a political programme which called for the complete liberation of our people and national homeland from the vestiges of Filipino colonialism, to ensure our people's freedom and the preservation of our Islamic and indigenous culture and civilization."

Peace talks were deemed crucial for the resolution of the conflict in Mindanao. Prior to the much popular Tripoli Agreement, several celebrated peace talks were convened by the government to encourage the re-affiliation of the Muslim rebels to the Philippine Government one of which is the Zamboanga Peace Talks of July 1975. In this event it was recorded that a total of 200 supposed members of the MNLFF have pledge their loyalty to the Philippine Republic and thereby opposed the programme and political leanings of the MNLFF group and its chairman. The Tripoli Agreement is often cited as the defining convention that was partially successful in instigating ceasefire in the Mindanao region. Through its provisions that allowed for the autonomy of the region most members of the MNLFF group have been ensured of their supposed victory. Even after the protracted implementation of the provisions in the agreement, a full-scale war in Mindanao such as the one that occurred in 1976 did not ensue again.

At this stage, it is pertinent to note that the type of political participation common among members of the MNLFF group is characterized by non-conformity to the constitutionally mandated forms of political actions such as voting, lobbying, petitions, and rallies. Instead, much of their actions may be classified as highly mobilized and armed.

### **The Sites**

The regional classification of the province of Palawan has been a subject of confusion for most due to the several changes in its affiliation through time which are Western Visayas, Southern Tagalog, and ARMM. For the first two regions, Palawan was categorized under these because of the socio-cultural similarities between the provinces of these regions. For the latter region, ARMM, the basis is more than the socio-cultural similarities. The foundation of the said affiliation is historical. It is accounted through

both oral and written history that the province of Palawan was once under the sultanate of Sulu. Even during the colonial periods, upheavals staged by the so-called *Moros* in Palawan have been recorded (Ocampo 1999:195). Hence, the presence of Muslims in the province is not an extraordinary occurrence. It is also not surprising that during and after the wars in Mindanao migration to the province by Muslims from the region was at its peak.

For the purposes of the earlier work<sup>5</sup>, I have purposively chosen Puerto Princesa City as the representative for the urban population while Balabac Municipality was chosen to characterize rural Palawan.

Local statistics highlight the concentration of Muslim residents in Puerto Princesa city in Barangays Bagong Silang, San Pedro and Sicsican. These barangays are also known for being the centers of Islamic religious activities. Barangay Bagong Silang is chosen to represent the Muslim population of Puerto Princesa City for the basic reason that a larger Muslim population resides here and that it is situated in greater proximity to the commercial centers of the city. Its total number of household reaches 707 and three mosques cater to the religious needs of the residents.

Balabac municipality, which consists of 20 barangays is a predominantly Muslim area. Aside from its proximity to Malaysia, a defining characteristic of this site is the presence and habitation of an Islamic indigenous group known as the Molbog who are the Pala'wans who were converted to Islam. The Municipality has a total number of household reaching to 296 with six mosques serving as the religious centers for the residents. Barangay Six is chosen as the representative barangay for the Municipality of Balabac for the main reason that the site is the 'melting pot' of almost every kind of Muslim group in the Municipality such as the Jama Mapuns, Tausugs, Maranaw and Molbog.

Forty-four percent of the respondents of this study are from the urban setting while 56% came from the rural area.

### **The Demographic Profile of the Informants**

The total number of informants for this current study is 60<sup>6</sup> out of the original 234 individuals who were interviewed in the earlier work. This

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<sup>5</sup> It was the assumption in the earlier work that the degree of urbanization of a place has an effect on the political behavior of the informant. Hence, it was necessary to select sites that would provide basis for rural-urban comparisons.

<sup>6</sup> A list of the names of the informants may be furnished based on request. However, some informants have invoked their right to anonymity in which case I have substituted their legal names with other preferred names.

ratio is due to the delimiting nature of this current work which focuses only on the political behavior of the MNLF rebel returnees as opposed to the generalized approach of the earlier work which included all Muslims in the province despite their affiliation or non-affiliation to the MNLF.

At this juncture, the division of the informants in terms of their age, sex, occupational background, educational attainment and type of locality are presented. It must be emphasized that these demographic backgrounds of the informants were assumed to have a bearing on their political behavior. This relationship between the said variables is discussed in the second section of this paper.

Regarding age, it was hypothesized that each age bracket has a different political history that they have witnessed which may affect their perceptions, attitudes, and actions. On a percentage basis, 34% of the 60 respondents were young, belonging to the 18-27 bracket. People of this age were born during the transitory period from the Marcos regime to the Aquino regime (1980-1989). People born during the political regime of Marcos (1970-1979) were the second most represented group reaching a percentage of 26. Those who were born during the Macapagal and Garcia period (1960-1969) were identified to have reached 19% while a total of 12% was accounted for those who belong to the 48-57 bracket who have experienced the policies enacted during the Magsaysay and Quirino (1950-1959) regimes. A total of 5% of the respondents witnessed the Japanese Occupation and the Liberation (1940-1949). Finally, those who experienced the American Occupation and the Commonwealth Government (1927-1939), were identified to have a 4% representation.

Another cultural factor that must be given consideration when Muslim political behavior is to be measured is one that concerns the sex of the individual and his/her prescribed gender roles. A total of 31 individuals are male which accounts for 52% of the total sample population. The number of female respondents for this study is 29 which represent 48% of the total sample population. This implies that 48% of the respondents are expected to be passive due to cultural dictates on gender roles as stipulated by the Islamic faith. It could also be expected based on gender roles that 52% of the respondents could be active in the political processes.

Another assumption in this study in terms of occupational background is that those individuals who are engaged in white-collared jobs or those that characterize the middle class are to be expected to be indulging more in institutional forms of political participation as opposed to those who are considered as meager earners who are often cited as having greater

potentials for joining mobilized political action.<sup>7</sup> Largely represented in this study are the people whose occupational backgrounds include students, housewives, unemployed, and religious personnel. These sectors garnered a total of 40% representation. The second most represented group is that which is related to agriculture which has a 32% proportion to the total percentage. Nearly 19 individuals claimed that their occupations are related to this field. Fishing, as an industry, also garnered a considerable rating of 13% with nearly nine individuals attesting that their primary mode of livelihood is related to the industry. Those who are currently employed or are retired from government service were identified to have a 6% representation in this survey while both trading and construction-related occupations reached a 4% representation. Social services, transportation, and manufacturing were computed to have a 1% representation in this survey.

Education is another factor that is believed to have a significant effect on the type of political behavior of an individual. It was assumed in this study that engagement in mass-based political action would often characterize individuals belonging to the less educated sectors while those who are more inclined to go through the constitutional ways of political action are those who completed college degrees or its equivalent. Thirty-two percent of the respondents have accomplished elementary level of education. The second most represented group would be the individuals who possess a high school level of education which garnered a percentage of 16. Individuals reaching the college level are computed to have a 13% representation while those who were able to finish elementary education follows with 11% computed percentage. High school graduates and college graduates are both computed to have 8% representation in this distribution while those who were able to finish a vocational course were identified to have 2% representation. Respondents with a graduate degree have a 1% representation. Those without formal education were identified to have a 9% representation while none of the respondents attested having reached and/or finished a post-graduate degree.

### **The Political Action Repertoire of the Returnees**

There are two types of political efficacy that are going to be discussed in this section. These are mobilized political efficacy (MPE) and institutionalized political efficacy (IPE). A high level of IPE characterized

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<sup>7</sup> Muller et al (1987:230) supports this assumption in their study about the relationship of the Soviet Putsch and rational choice theory.

the respondents, 88% specifically, believes that it is through institutional means of political activity that the government may be invoked to act on pressing issues or needs of its constituents. This also implies that majority of the respondents believe in their ability to effect the government into action without much provocation. This may be rooted on the belief that the government is efficient in addressing the needs of its people. Surprisingly, it was identified that 175 respondents or 75% possess a high level of MPE. A high level of MPE suggests that the individual has a strong belief that the only way of effecting the government into action would be through radical means of political participation. This is a by-product of the notion of the government's inability to respond to the true needs of its constituents. Hence, intensive political action, especially those which will catch the authorities' immediate attention are considered as best forms of political acquiring political recognition and the benefits entailed by such. According to Wolfsfeld's (1986) model of political action, an individual possessing high IPE and high MPE may be categorized under the pragmatic type of political action which implies the usage of both mobilized and institutional forms of political action.

At this point it is pertinent to identify the various types of political action that the returnees are practicing. Are they truly pragmatic or are these results merely representing the political ideals of the informants? From the checklist that was devised to measure the type of political actions being participated by the returnees it was found out that 52% of them are politically inactive, 32 % are pragmatic, 13 % are dissidents, and three percent are conformist. A politically inactive individual does not usually engage in any political activity whether it is institutional or mobilized. This is the opposite of a pragmatic who indulges in all forms of political activity. The conformist is an individual who participates in political actions that are recognized as constitutional while the dissident chiefly engages in mobilized actions that are often beyond the provisions of the constitution (Wolsfeld 1986). Given these results it seemed that there is a theoretical discrepancy regarding the type of political efficacy and the corresponding political action of the informants. During focus group discussions this inconsistencies were related to the discussants. Regarding the apparent pragmatism in political perspectives of the returnees it was agreed by the members that the result is not flawed, nor is the conceptual framework. Gen. Estino Ayyobie, a former MNLF provincial commander designated in Palawan, stated that due to the lack of institutional structures that could facilitate the political needs and aspirations of the MNLF rebel returnees, their political ideals often differ from their political actions and behavior.

Apart from political efficacy, the economic values of the informants were also measured as significant influencing perspectives to the political behavior of the individual. Political benefits which entail the material rewards, peer acceptance, and public good that an individual realizes or receives by joining a political activity is a sector in this variable. It was found out that 57% of the respondents believe that joining political activities yields high political benefits. Hence, these rewards may significantly affect their mode of participation. This is further supported by their response to the question referring to their perceived cost of political action. Sixty-eight percent of the informants attested that the cost of political action is low compared to the benefits that they are able to acquire.

The last factor that was measured in reference to political action and behavior is that of political values. Support for regime norms is a value that was proven to have a significant relationship with the type of political action that the individual would commit. Sixty percent of the informants have signified high support for regime norms. When viewed in relation to their expected type of political action and the actual type that they practice, this percentage distribution is again intriguing. If individuals have high support for regime norms then the type of political action that is to be expected is that of conformist. However, in this study, only three percent of all the informants were categorized under the conformist category. Most were classified as inactive and pragmatic. This issue was addressed in another forum wherein Prof. Idris Kuhutan, a local Muslim scholar, stated that majority of the returnees have truly pledged their loyalty to the Philippine Republic. However, due to the inability of the government to address the needs of the group they are then disposed to inform the regime of their wants and needs through the mobilized methods which they were engaging in prior to their surrender. This makes them pragmatic. However, the informants are bound to inactivity due to the sanctions imposed by the government on such mobilized actions.

## **THE SYNCRETIC POLICY**

### **The Borraque Secretariat**

The political action of the MNLF rebel returnees, which is characterized by inactive political participation, has been beset by various inconsistencies such as their political ideals that lean on pragmatism and strong support for the current regime, and tending towards a conformist behavior. In this juncture it is worthwhile to discuss the socio-political

coping mechanisms that were employed by the members of the said group to strengthen their campaign for national recognition in a highly Christianized nation.

Self-determination is a concept that has been fought about by Muslim groups and the Philippine government. Though this is still a prevalent conflict-related notion in the practice of governance within the Philippine territory, this is not the main argument that is being resolved by the ex-members of the MNLF. Ethnonationalism is the root of Bangsa Moro rebellion, which pushes for the reclamation of the ancestral domains of the Muslim peoples in the Philippines. However, it seems like a stale struggle for the informants. Their current struggle is related to the means by which they could venture into the major stream of Philippine political system. Since the most pervading problem that they have regarding political participation is the lack of institutional mechanisms, a need to have a structure that shall facilitate their participation in the system is inevitable.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of January 2007, a group of 40 men convened in Bagong Silang. All of them are former leaders and members of the MNLF and are scattered throughout the province. The main agenda of the meeting which only allowed three women to participate is the participation of the Borraque Secretariat in the 2007 local elections that was conducted May of the same year.

The secretariat, which was formed a year earlier, was named after a Qu'ran character, an animal that typifies a Pegasus or a horse with wings. It is believed that this animal is a bringer of help and blessings from Allah. In the same way, the Borraque Secretariat functions as a support group for Muslims who are interested in joining the elections. Interestingly enough, the secretariat offers aid not only to Muslim political aspirants but also to members of other indigenous groups in Palawan. The reason for this according to Ayyobie, acting chairman of the secretariat, is that the members recognize the difficulty of penetrating the system as members of a minority group. He further added that by extending support to both Muslims and members of indigenous groups they are broadening the possibility of being represented in the government. Representation, as it was apparent, was the main objective of the informants.

It must be noted that the secretariat is not a political party. In fact one of the agenda during the said meeting is to identify which political party the members shall affiliate themselves to. The result of the discussions was that the members would remain associated to the secretariat but would be under the political umbrella of various political parties. A total of eight people who attended that said meeting participated in the local elections of May 2007

with positions ranging from board members of congressional districts to municipal councilors. The support that was extended by the secretariat came in the forms of leaflets distribution, financial aid, provision of election materials, and campaigning.

The elections' turnover resulted against the candidates. Only one was able to secure a seat in the government.<sup>8</sup> The adverse election results were not taken in ill regard by the members of the secretariat. Gen. Ayyobie positively viewed the event as another avenue through which the presence of the Muslims has been bannered in the Philippine political scene. He claims that "this is just another step towards national recognition of the institutional approach of the Bangsamoro to Philippine politics."

With this statement and the events that transpired relating to the Borraque Secretariat, it could be said that a form of political syncretism has been adopted by the MNLF rebel returnees. As defined earlier, political syncretism is a practice and a set of perspectives that fuses new forms of political participation with the traditional set of political ideals and practices. The lack of internal recognition has been one of the root causes of the separatist struggle of the Muslim group. It is this socio-political dilemma that propelled most forms of rebellion staged by the members of the group against the government. Through the establishment of the Borraque Secretariat, the former members of the MNLF in Palawan have found a new channel for their participation in the government and consequently, a new way of being recognized by other institutions within the country.

### **Demographic Backgrounds as Factors Affecting the Informants Political Behavior**

The creation of the secretariat sheds light on other matters such as the participation of Muslim women in political affairs, the role of age in determining the extent of the support of the members to the visions and missions of the secretariat, and the occupational and educational background of the members.

From what was observed, the role of the women in the secretariat is confined mostly to non-decision making tasks such as campaigning, creating campaign materials, events organizing and such. As stated earlier, during the "critical" meeting of the Borraque Secretariat only three females were allowed to join the discussions. These females are the representative heads of

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<sup>8</sup> Mayor Abram Idba of Bataraza Palawan was supported by the secretariat during the campaign period.

the female sector of the Muslim community. Ultimately and expectedly, the males are entrusted with the decision making tasks.

This phenomenon is not only seen within the confines of the Borraque Secretariat. In a survey that was conducted for this study it was found out that majority of the women are politically inactive. Given that women are culturally bound to submit to men, especially those of her husband and kin, it is understandable that if the males are politically inactive the women are to follow the same political behavior lest they are ostracized.<sup>9</sup>

As expected, the greater percentage of individuals adhering to conformist type of political action was identified to be present among the female respondents. In fact, the greatest percentage (67%) of the women's representation fell under the inactive category. This trend could be rooted in the culturally dictated gender role of women in Islamic societies. It must be noted that Islamic culture promotes the subservience of women to men. Hence, it could also be understood why during public meetings, men are invited while the women would either be instructed to remain at home or be brought to the place of gathering but not as a participant.<sup>10</sup>

A greater percentage of pragmatic male respondents (59%) can be observed as opposed to the women's representation which is identified at 41%. This entails the fluidity of the males' involvement in the political process more than that of the women. This pragmatism may be due to the extent by which males are exposed to the political process which is by far greater than those of the women.

It is interesting to note, however, that 57% of the dissident population is classified as belonging to the female group rather than that of the male group which garnered a total percentage of 43%. This generally implies the changing nature of women's political participation. This is strengthened by the fact that 58% of the total number of female dissidents are within the age range of 18-27 of which the majority are students. It could be further assumed that the prevalent gender empowerment occurring in schools may have affected these women's perception of their relationship to the government and the society in general.

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<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is also based on the observation of this researcher which was validated by the observations made by the enumerators during the administration of the survey. In circumstances wherein a male and a female head of different households are interviewed simultaneously, it was generally observed that the woman would merely echo the responses made by the man to the questions given by the researcher.

<sup>10</sup> During such occasions it was observed that women are confined to logistical support tasks.

Though most theoretical orientations propose that education and occupation have bearings on the political behavior of an individual, the results for this study have proven otherwise. This is not to say that the two variables have no relationship with the political disposition of the individual. However, the two variables are not the major considerations that an individual take prior to engaging in a political activity. It was observed that the Borraque Secretariat actually consisted of members who are varied in terms of educational attainment. There are members who have post-graduate degrees while there are also those who have no formal education.

Another observation that was made is that individuals who are educated in institutions that have a culturally pluralistic population are more inclined to be pragmatic than those who studied in specialized Muslim schools like the Shafi'i. This is due to the acculturating process within such pluralistic institutions which more often than not espouses the values of democracy.

In terms of occupation, it was found out that political inactivity is the most prevalent type of political behavior among the respondents with exception to those who are involved in government services, social services, transportation, and trading who were identified to have inclination to the conformist category. For the dissidents, the occupational background that garnered the highest frequency is that of the agricultural sector. For the pragmatic category the highest scorer among the occupational sectors would be that of the students, housewives, and unemployed. These data affirm that Muslims in Palawan, specifically the MNLF rebel returnees, are not motivated by their type of occupation to politically behave in a particular manner. To strengthen this argument, the data on the government services' category must be tackled again. The general expected behavior for this group is that of a conformist or even inactive due to the nature of their work. People under this category are not to be expected to indulge in radical or unorthodox types of political action because they are assumed to have strong affiliation and support for the regime norms. The data presented here proves this assumption inconsistent. A total of 54% of the total number of the respondents working for the government have participated and are participating in unorthodox means of political participation. Their occupation has not affected their choice of political action.

The last variable in the Demographic Profile consortium is that of residence type. Balabac Municipality chiefly consists of Muslims. Though there are a considerable number of residents in the municipality that are affiliated to Christian groups, that number is lesser than that with which the Muslims of Bagong Silang in Puerto Princesa mingles with. Out of the 707 number of households in Barangay Bagong Silang only 15% are affiliated to

the Muslim group. This is in stark opposition to the nearly 65% Muslim household present in Poblacion Six, Balabac Municipality. Apart from this difference in societal composition, the area of residence may affect the degree to which the individual has access to media which is critical in his/her political values formation.

The level of individualism in an urban area is higher than that in the rural area which espouses the principles of the community as an organism. Where individualism encourages the attainment of personal good, the idea of community as an organism seeks attainment of public good. Hence, it could be expected that people from the urban areas are much more inclined to dissociate from mass movements. People from rural areas may be more comfortable in acting as a group to invoke governmental action.

It was observed that 83% of the total dissident population is under the rural area category. Pragmatism which also entails some acts of radicalism which includes mass movements, has a higher frequency in the rural area than in the urban. The inactive category has a higher number of representations from the urban area than the other. Such inactivity may be rooted in the political willingness of the individual to participate in any activity which may have been influenced by the imbibed perspectives of capitalism and individualism that are prevalent in such a setting. This result is parallel to the arguments of Yahya (2004) regarding the Muslims of Quai-po Manila. It is also valuable to know that majority of the members of the Borraque Secretariat are from the city. This supports the claim made earlier that conformist behavior is usually found in urban settings.

These five variables (age, sex, occupation, education and residence) are significantly responsible for the current behavior of the former MNLF members. It is also expected that these same variables are acting as agents of change in the political action repertoire of the MNLF rebel returnees.

## **Conclusion**

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the political action repertoire of the former members of the Moro National Liberation Front in the province of Palawan. With this objective came the task of identifying the factors that may be influential in the observable political behavior of the members of the group. The analysis presented in this paper offers serious challenges to the leaders of this government. It was found out that the Muslims in Palawan have high levels of political efficacy. This should have

motivated them to participate actively in the political process in the republic. However, it was also found out that majority of them are inactive. This implies that though they have strong perceptions about the means by which they should be involved in the governing of this province, not to mention the country, several personal and institutional factors hinder them from doing so.

The rational choice theory that was tested in this study proves to be a source of critical determinants of Muslim participation in politics. It was found out that the group weighs the cost and benefits of an action before taking part in it. Material benefits and expenses were proved to have the highest effect on the decisions of the respondents towards a political activity. Another component of this analysis is the patron-client orientation of the respondents. There are some evidences that establish the existence of some form of political dependency on some personalities. This is especially true during elections.

It was also found out that the prevalent connotation that Muslims are not supportive of democratic values, much less governmental policies, is not true for those who are based in Palawan. This has implications on the plausibility of instigating them to be active in the political arena.

Though it is clear that the respondents have inclinations to participate in mobilized political actions, collective action may not be expected from them due to their apparent low faith in the credibility of people.

Sex, as a determinant of one's gender roles, has high implications on the political behavior of Muslims in Palawan. Though majority of both sexes are proven to be inactive, it was interesting to note that there seems to be a form of deviation from the expected behavior from women. It was found out that more women are inclined to be dissidents than men.

The locality where the individual is based has effects on his political behavior. Urban residents are more inclined to individual political action while rural residents have higher inclination to participate in collective action.

The age of the individual is a critical determinant of political action. Pragmatism and inactivity characterizes the younger population while inactivity and conformity are observed from the older respondents.

The Borraque Secretariat is a potent institutional mechanism devised by the former members of the MNLF to address their need for participation in constitutionally dictated political actions such as voting, lobbying and petitions. With its participation in the May 2007 elections the Muslim ideals of being nationally recognized as a group has been concretized in a democratic package. This is the most fluent example of political syncretism

that is transpiring in the consciousness and practice of most members of the group in study.

As a final point, it could be said that the political action repertoire of Muslims in Palawan which is generally in the form of inactivity is influenced by age, sex, residence, level of institutional political efficacy, support for regime norms, and cost and benefit rationalization. It is through these same factors that they could be instigated to be more involved in the political arena. It is through these factors that the success of mechanisms like the Borraque Secretariat could be weighed. Without the support of fellow Muslims, it could be expected that the goals of the Secretariat would not yield any gain in answering for the Muslim struggle in general.

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