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## **Representing Muslimness: Strategic Essentialism in a Land Dispute in Metro Manila**

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# Representing Muslimness Strategic Essentialism in a Land Dispute in Metro Manila

This article analyzes how Muslims in Metro Manila faced a land dispute and mobilized themselves for nonviolent struggle in a place other than their homeland in the Philippine south. The land dispute was retold in the idiom of religious struggle, but the narrative differed from that used in the armed conflict in the 1970s in the south. In the national capital region Muslims fought with lawsuits and rallies, and used the mass media to their advantage. Lawyers appealed to the concept of waqf (endowment land) based on Shariah, while students who organized rallies relied on different strategies to appeal to elders and youth. Participation in the rallies was marked by gender and generational differences, but the claim of unity needs to be reconsidered. The creative representation of Muslimness sustained a final court battle that lasted eight years, which culminated in a legal victory in 1997. The case highlights the practice of strategic essentialism by a minority group.

**KEYWORDS: MUSLIMNESS · LAND DISPUTE · REPRESENTATION · STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM · ETHNIC MINORITY**

This article follows the struggles of Philippine Muslims through a decade-long land dispute that took place in the Salam Mosque Compound, one of the three largest Muslim migrant communities in Metro Manila. The compound—which houses nearly 15,000 people who belong to various ethnic groups such as the Maranao, Tausug, Maguindanao, Sama, Yakan, and Iranun, along with some Balik-Islam (Filipino converts “returning” to Islam)—has a complex history of political activism and collective mobilization that no other Muslim community in Metro Manila has had. The compound was the subject of a land dispute that resulted in a series of judicial trials, which provided the pretext for rallies organized by Muslim youth and students in Metro Manila. The various Muslim sectors involved utilized their Muslimness to win the case, an important instance of the practice of so-called strategic essentialism in the Philippines.

### **Strategic Essentialism**

The term “strategic essentialism” has long been a component of movements of indigenous peoples. With the global community recognizing the vitality of these movements, the United Nations designated 1993 as the International Year for the World’s Indigenous Peoples.<sup>1</sup> In response to these movements, scholars have debated the merits and otherwise of strategic essentialism, a term initially coined by Spivak (1990) to refer to a means by which minority or indigenous groups fought for their survival by defining their identity and culture in essentialist terms. For example, the international media spotlighted a protest rally by the Kayapo in 1992 to protest the construction of a dam in the Amazon that would have affected their residential areas. In staging their protest, with the Kayapo participants wearing traditional combat accessories, a Kayapo woman brandished a blade over the representative of the electric company. These were demonstrations—a series of self-representations of the stereotyped “warlike Indians” by the Indians themselves—which eventually led to the suspension of the dam project (Furuya 2001). Similar strategies have been used in the movements of, among others, the Mashpee in the United States and the Aborigines in Australia. Strategic essentialism plays a positive role when reinforced with political movements or narratives, as in the case of the Maori (Thomas 1994), and seems to be effective in regaining the voices of the subaltern.

However, the practice of strategic essentialism invites criticism that it poses the risk of homogenizing diversity, occluding dissenting voices within

the said group, and serving to reproduce and reinforce the dominant narratives and negative images created mainly by the former colonial states. In light of this critique, Mabuchi (2005) emphasizes the importance of highlighting the diversity of positions and perspectives within society and the social relations among their members. Oda (1999) has adopted the term “bricolage,” which was originally used by Lévi-Strauss, to describe the creative dynamism within the group.<sup>2</sup> These internal aspects of indigenous movements are important; however, the focus of this article is on the dynamism by which Muslim actors publicly deployed stereotypical images of themselves to promote their cause during years of litigation. In this regard, Furuya (2001) employs the concept of “hybridity” to portray the dynamism within Kayapo society, focusing on their use of international communication tools. The seemingly “primitive” community of indigenous peoples could spread their voices around the world by using modern equipment that effectively caught the attention of civil society. This “hybridity”—which refers to any combination of tactics that seem to be contradictory—is a strategy in itself.

This dynamic aspect of strategic essentialism is what I demonstrate in the self-representations that Muslims mobilized to gain advantage in a land dispute involving the Salam Mosque Compound. In doing so, I first discuss how the various actors were involved in the compound’s activism; second, I map out the strategies that were utilized, that is, how they represented themselves in various contexts so as to win a major court battle to recover their land in Metro Manila; and, third, I determine how their situation away from the homeland in the south affected the form and content of the rallies and, above all, the court cases. By doing so, I seek to provide some insights into the ways and means by which a migrant Muslim minority sought to obtain justice in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup>

The distinctiveness of the Salam Mosque Compound can be highlighted by comparison with the case of Bangkok Muslims in Thailand. As with the Muslims in the Philippines, the Muslims of southern Thailand, or Malay Muslims, are ethnic minorities who have organized secessionist movements. The presence of Muslim populations in capital cities helps illuminate the nature of state policy toward these minority groups as well as the prevailing attitudes of the majority population. As with the Muslims of the Salam Mosque Compound, the Muslim community in Bangkok, called Ban Krua, also faced eviction from the government and had to defend the land with their own human resources and without any external assistance.

Thai scholar Chaiwat Satha-Ananda (2001, 98) has documented the ways in which the people utilized Islamic symbols to organize themselves and project their being Muslims (that is, by holding prayer rallies) during their non-violent struggle. This practice resonates with the strategies utilized by the people in the Salam Mosque Compound, who used “Islam” to assert their identity as well as gain sympathizers from among local and foreign Muslims. As these are usually associated with verbal acts, the symbolic expressions of Islam have a powerful effect when articulated through language (Eickelman and Piscatori 1997, 9). They become the means of socialization that “create a social bond between individuals and groups, since the roles and social relations available in society are transmitted through language” (Pekonen 1989, 132). Nevertheless, the people did not bond by Islam alone—there were historical, social, and cultural factors that bound the community.

In his contribution to Philippine Muslim studies, Thomas McKenna (1998, 286) cites reasons for why common people in Cotabato fought for or otherwise supported armed separatist movements: “self defense, revenge, plunder, defense of local communities, social pressure, armed coercion, and personal ambition, among others.” In Cotabato, where Muslims are natives, they are bound by land and various social restraints such as social class, economic strata, bilinear kinship relations, and the like, but are relatively homogeneous in terms of their ethnic background. In Metro Manila, however, Muslims are not territorially defined and are less tied down by the social restraints McKenna mentions due to the diverse mix of people coexisting in one area. Moreover, the case analyzed by McKenna was a movement trying to establish an imagined community of a Moro nation,<sup>4</sup> whereas the case of the Salam Mosque Compound was a struggle over a specific parcel of land.

In Metro Manila mobilization relied on the culture of political protest and student activism. The national capital region had been an arena for rallies, and especially so after People Power in 1986. Not surprisingly, Muslim students who obtained their higher education in the capital had been exposed to campus life and other nonacademic activities. Political rallies, for example, taught these Muslims the skills of mobilization and public performance, through contact with non-Muslim activist groups. These Muslim youth did not always come from the aristocratic class or from prominent families, but embarked on and led political actions, a sphere traditionally reserved for elites. Moreover, female Muslim students had a relatively sizeable presence, whereas females attaining higher education had not been

the rule in the provinces. Thus, in this article, particular emphasis is given to the role of gender and generation in Muslim mobilization. In fact, features such as the attainment of higher education especially by women and the indirect conflict experienced by the younger generation have determined the extent and limits of mobilization.

### **The Land in Question**

There are between 3.5 to 5 million Muslims in the Philippines, making up nearly 5 to 10 percent of the total national population.<sup>5</sup> They belong to thirteen ethnolinguistic groups, each with a home region in some part of Mindanao Island and the Sulu Archipelago, known collectively as the “Muslim South”: Maranao in Lanao; Maguindanao in Cotabato; and Tausug in Sulu, to cite some examples. It is well known that Muslim Filipinos, otherwise known as Moros, have been “problematized” as a minority,<sup>6</sup> which became prominent after the intensification of the Moro separatist movement at the end of 1960s. One of the major outcomes of the conflict was the outflow of the Muslim population from Mindanao and Sulu. Metro Manila became one of the main destinations. Today some 120,000 Muslim people live side by side with other ethnolinguistic groups and form communities in various parts of Metro Manila.<sup>7</sup> Many of these communities are products of the conflicts in the south, the politicoeconomic involvements of Muslim countries in the Middle East, and the policies of accommodation of the Philippine government. At the same time, some communities were established through Islamic, cross-ethnolinguistic, or trans-stratum cooperation. The Salam Mosque Compound, the community discussed in this article, is noteworthy for having been built on all of the above foundations.

The 4.9-hectare Salam Mosque Compound is located along Tandang Sora Avenue in Quezon City. In 1971 Libyan Minister of State Salih Bouyasir donated money to acquire land, considered as a waqf (“charity” in Arabic), for the purpose of establishing an Islamic center. The Islamic Directorate of the Philippines (IDP) was created as a recipient organization.<sup>8</sup> In November 1971, with US\$2 million in Libyan funds, the IDP purchased two parcels of land along Tandang Sora Avenue from a Philippine Chinese enterprise.<sup>9</sup> The IDP also registered itself at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a religious institution.<sup>10</sup>

Although the IDP had planned to put up a complex composed of a mosque, a *madaris* (Islamic learning school; *madrasah*, plural), a library, a

hospital, and other buildings on the donated land, these plans were changed by the tide of history. Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in September 1972; he suspended the national legislature and suppressed the communist and Moro separatist movements. Many of the executive board members of the IDP fled to the south or to the Middle East, because they were either political enemies of Marcos or were antigovernment activists. The IDP president, too, went underground, leaving the land patent of the waqf to Fiscal Najeeb Nasir, the only board member who stayed in Manila.<sup>11</sup> Thence the property was abandoned.<sup>12</sup> Without further financial assistance from Libya or any move toward the establishment of an Islamic center, the two parcels of land were nearly forgotten by the people.

The land issue came up again in 1978 when the Quezon City Government gave notice to the IDP of its intention to confiscate the two parcels of land on Tandang Sora Avenue in accordance with the law, stating that the land would be turned into public domain if the owner failed to pay property taxes for five consecutive years. Commissioner Romulo Espaldon of the Commission of Muslim Affairs arranged to settle the arrears in tax payments.<sup>13</sup> Because he was a Balik-Islam, he consulted with Atty. Ali Abubakar of the Islamic Dawwah Council of the Philippines (IDCP), also a Balik-Islam.<sup>14</sup> They paid the outstanding taxes by selling one of the parcels of land and making

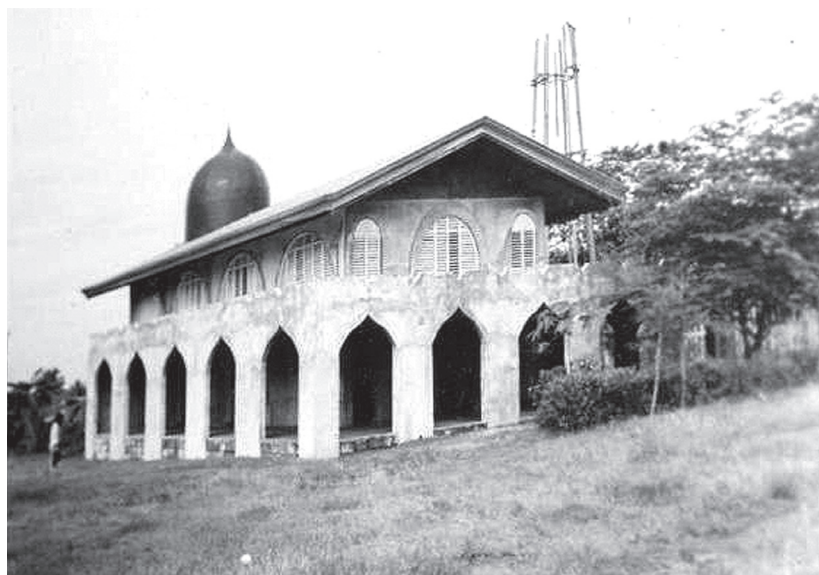


Fig. 1. The mosque in the early 1980s

do with the budget set by the Commissioner of Muslim Affairs. They built a mosque in 1979 (fig. 1) and a madaris a few years later. The maintenance of the land and the mosque was entrusted to a group of Balik-Islam (including nominal Muslims), who went to Manila from Bacolod and Iloilo to find overseas work (Noi 2005). In return, they were allowed to live on the property, the existence of which was not well known among the Muslim public.<sup>15</sup>

In 1986 the parcel of land was put on the limelight after the change of power from Marcos to Corazon Aquino. The new administrator of the city of Manila tried to turn the Quiapo district into a new Muslim tourist area. Quiapo had long been the site of Muslim migration from the south but had become notorious as a hotbed of criminality. The city mayor ordered the removal of Muslim squatters in the Golden Mosque area in Quiapo. To pacify Muslim reaction, Candu Muharrif, director of the newly established Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) under the Office of the President, said that there was (free) land for Muslims in Quezon City. Thus, a group of Muslim squatters was relocated to the waqf, despite its original intent as a religious complex.

The Muslims who were brought to the land on Tandang Sora Avenue in October 1986 were engaged in retail businesses or were working as sidewalk vendors, security guards, recruiters, overseas workers, and the like. The land in Quezon City became a satellite for those who were still based in Quiapo.<sup>16</sup> In fact many of the Muslim relocatees were earning their livelihood in Quiapo but residing in Tandang Sora at night or during weekends. Over several years the compound's population gradually increased because of the inflow of Muslims from the Islamic Center in San Miguel, Manila, and the government-led Maharlika Village in Taguig.

Meanwhile a new IDP was created in 1984 composed of Abubakar, who managed the mosque; Atty. Najeeb Nasir, who kept the land patent; and engineer Casan Casim, who was one of the original members of the IDP.<sup>17</sup> In 1988 they borrowed P9 million from a Christian Filipino, Mrs. Lena Leon, by mortgaging the land on Tandang Sora Avenue (Congress of the Republic of the Philippines House Committee 1997).<sup>18</sup> They used a portion of the loan to settle the property tax payment, which was levied annually, and diverted the other portions to their own purposes. A year later, as there was no chance of paying back the loan from Leon, they asked her to sell the land to generate the cash that would pay back the loan. Besides the default on the loan, they had other reasons for pushing for the land sale. Due to

the influx of Muslim squatters, the IDP regarded the land as no longer suitable for establishing an Islamic center. Afraid that the Libyan government would hesitate to resume financial assistance to put up an Islamic center, they decided to sell the land and buy a new one where they could pursue the original plan (Abubakar 2003). Meanwhile Leon suggested reselling the land to the adjacent religious institution, the Iglesia ni Kristo (INK), which legally owned the east and southern portions of the land. In April 1989 the IDP, Leon, and an INK representative formed an agreement. The land was sold for P23 million of which P1 million was to be given initially to the new IDP to relocate the Muslim inhabitants, and the rest to be paid when their eviction was completed (SCRA 1997).

The IDP offered P3,000 per household for the relocation. Owing to family and ethnic ties with the IDP, financial need, and an aversion to disputes, many Muslim settlers accepted the compensation. Only a few refused. There were some who took the payment but did not move out of the land, while others from other parts of Metro Manila quickly settled on the property just to obtain the money. Amid this disorder, demolitions were implemented nine times. The seventh demolition, held in September 1990, ended with only seventeen families left: fifteen Tausug and two Maranao. Nearly all the buildings were torn down, except for the mosque and the madrasah building, where people sought shelter. It was then that an armed clash broke out between Muslims and the INK's security agents, resulting in six casualties on the Muslim side, including Arab university students (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 1980). Top media reports indicated that, whereas the security agents used guns, the Muslims fought back with nothing but stones. A Muslim interviewee likened it to the situation in Palestine. Upon hearing the news, the Administrative Assembly of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao denounced the incident and warned that if not properly handled it "might be another time bomb that will explode anytime between the two sects" (*Malaya* 1990). In this way, what began as a land dispute quickly acquired the idiom of a religious conflict, which was easily evoked in the minds of Muslims because a politically powerful religious institution was the perceived opponent.

### **The Beginning of Muslim Self-Representations**

It was then that Atty. Blo Umpar Adiong, a Maranao, and Fiscal Omar Basa, a Tausug, had a meeting with then Libyan Ambassador Salih Adim. Ini-

tially the ambassador was resentful of the Philippine Muslims for selling the charitable land and implied an "eye-for-an-eye" response to them because, according to *Shariah* (Islamic law), no waqf could be sold, divided, or conveyed. The ambassador then asked Adiong and Basa to solve the two problems of the sale of the charitable land and the gunning down of the Muslim brothers (Adiong 2005). However, the two lawyers insisted on keeping their actions within Philippine law. Besides being lawyers by profession, they wished to differentiate themselves from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that resorted to arms to fulfill their goal. It was important for them to show that they were "moderate Muslims" who would try to deal with the case by legal means.

In response to the Libyan ambassador, Basa helped to call on Muslims from other areas in Metro Manila to counter the INK by increasing their numbers on the land. He gave priority to the Tausug, admitting that he had a bias toward his own ethnic group, but thought the Tausug were reliable, unlike other business-minded groups that might think the land could be a good deal and sell it. "We fought against America and Spain, and we were never conquered. We are warrior by nature," he said (Basa 2005). Adiong, for his part, became the bond lawyer of the original IDP in the legal battle (*ibid.*).<sup>19</sup> He explained the situation to the Islam World League based in Saudi Arabia and pleaded for financial assistance in order to start to file cases in court. His claim was that they were not *kafir* (unbeliever) who sold the waqf, but were "true Muslims" who complied with Islam and thus were trying to recover the land. By representing themselves as "devoted Muslims," Adiong was able to get the financial resources from the league.

For the next two years, Adiong filed court cases against the INK, accusing the latter of human rights violation and seeking the annulment of the land sale with the Commission on Human Rights as well as the Quezon City Regional Trial Court. On the whole, he brought nearly ten cases to different courts, but none was decided in favor of the Muslims. Adiong attributed the losses to his opponents' bribing of the judges. His last hope was to file a case with the SEC. He reckoned that, if the self-appointed IDP leaders who were not on the list registered at the SEC undertook the sale, the deed might well be null and void. The Muslims had the possibility of winning the case with this line of argument. The problem, however, was the high risk of bribery. Thus, the lawyers came up with the idea of bringing public attention to the case by organizing rallies. They thought that, because ordinary Filipinos

were afraid of Muslim “fighters” or *juramentados* (persons engaged in ritualized suicide),<sup>20</sup> nobody would dare to enter the court and offer bribes to the SEC officers if Muslims would shout and wave signs in front of the venue (Adiong 2005). They appropriated the Filipino stereotyping of Muslims as “militants”—such as *mamamatay tao* (murderer) and *mata pang iyan* (they are intrepid)—to forestall the possibility of bribery and other under-the-table arrangements by the other party.

### Appropriating Muslimness in Mobilizing for Rallies

The clash on Tandang Sora Avenue in September 1990 spurred nongovernmental and nonprofit Christian organizations that were concerned about the urban poor and human rights issues. Among the notable activities were those undertaken by the Al-Fatihah Foundation (AFFI), the Moro Human Rights Center (MHRC), and the Bangsamoro Youth and Students Association (BYSA).<sup>21</sup> Although only a few inhabitants were left on the land, the Tausug and Maranao had separate leaders there, indicating the lack of unity between the two groups. Members of the AFFI learned about this division when they had to obtain permission from the two leaders in order to distribute relief goods to the people who evacuated to the mosque and the madaris. Thus they encouraged the inhabitants to organize themselves so they could protect the charitable land and the mosque that belonged to Allah (fig. 2). The mosque was named the Salam Mosque in hopes of “peace,” and its managing agency was created and called the Salam Mosque and Madrasah Advisory Council, Inc. (SMMAC).<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, in 1990, the land on Tandang Sora Avenue was called the Salam Mosque Compound.

The BYSA acted during the ninth demolition in August 1991, with its members setting up human barricades in front of the compound’s gate to prevent the demolition squad and the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines from entering the vicinity. The three organizations—the AFFI, MHRC, and BYSA—cooperated with each other, and indeed many Muslims belonged to one or more of these organizations. Naturally news of the activities of these Muslim youth reached the ears of Adiong and Basa, who contacted their leaders to discuss strategies to win the case.

Student members of the BYSA and AFFI who lived on the compound played active roles in their community.<sup>23</sup> While doing door-to-door solicitations for the rallies, they tried to organize students and out-of-school youth in the community. Accordingly two informal associations, *Kampilan*, were



Fig. 2. Salam Mosque, 4 November 2005

formed under the BYSA. Seeking the empowerment of the community’s youth, they held meetings in the mosque three times a week and invited Muslim students from other areas. The students did not forget to collaborate with their respective ethnic leaders in the compound. They linked up with the Tausug-dominated SMMAC; the Organization for Maguindanaon and Iranon; Maranao groups; and the Islamic Directorate of Basilan, which was composed of Yakan. They supported the rallies to achieve the goal of securing their residences through victory in the lawsuit. To be more precise, they made a rule that well-off households would contribute financially to the rallies, while others would provide one to three representatives from each household to attend every rally.

Information was disseminated throughout the different Muslim communities in Metro Manila. The BYSA chapter members in Muslim communities invited rally participants through word of mouth and house-to-house coordination, but they never failed to utilize the mosques, which were centers of the everyday religious and social lives of Muslims. They requested the imam and administrators of mosques to announce the rallies after congregational prayers, or they made announcements on their own. However,

they did not mention that some Muslim leaders had mishandled and sold the land, in order that interclass discord among Muslims would not surface. Instead, they emphasized that the land was given as waqf by Libya and was about to be taken away by nonbelievers. They called for the solidarity of Muslims by linking the issue with the history of the conflict in Mindanao. Their calls were enhanced through judicial documents and testaments that were distributed and posted in strategic spots. They even published a newsletter called *Suara Karapatan* (Word of Justice). In addition, they held press conferences to give broad publicity to the issue. Through these various means, the youth tried to mobilize Muslims from other areas by transforming the problem of the compound residents into an issue that affected the entire Muslim community.

### **Utilization of Media and Muslim Orientalization of Rallies**

From appealing to the court of the SEC in 1992 to the Supreme Court in 1997, rallies were staged in front of the SEC building, the Commission on Human Rights, the Quezon City Regional Trial Court, the Court of Appeals, Malacañang Palace, the Supreme Court, and the Congress. Some rallies were held during the hearings and inquiries, while others were held irrespective of the schedule of court cases. Sound volume was one way to get the attention of the public; speakers used microphone amplifiers during ordinary rallies. However, activities without much noise drew even more attention—Muslims holding a prayer rally in front of Malacañang Palace.

Initially the rallies were left-leaning. In June 1992, nearly 500 people were mobilized in the rally from an assembly of several groups, including non-Muslim organizations. News reports on the clash with the INK pushed several NGOs to go to the compound and liaise with the residents. Evidently the press coverage elicited sympathy or political interest from various sectors. A certain leftist group spearheaded a joint rally.<sup>24</sup> They were aware that bigger rallies attracted more attention from the mass media than small rallies. Each organization was concerned about its own issues and brought its own followers to the rally. A left-wing inclined BYSA member also sent a representative from the compound.

Their Muslim orientation broadened out in succeeding rallies as the size of rallies and the number of supporters increased progressively. Presumably this expansion was because the BYSA was federated into the newly established organization called the Muslim Youth and Student Alliance

(MYSA), which was set up in 1992 for a broad mobilization network. They also preached Islamic values by inviting *ustadja* (female Islamic teachers) to the Muslim communities.<sup>25</sup> The *ustadja* initially taught women in the compound and subsequently opened madrasah classes for children. Hereafter the MYSA took the initiative of holding rallies for the land issue of the compound (Gutoc-Tomawis 2005).<sup>26</sup>

In October 1993 protesters proceeded to the Golden Mosque in Quiapo, where they assembled with other Muslim organizations and groups, including the Jamaat Tabligh, an Islamic propagation group that happened to be there from the southern Philippines. The people gathered at the Golden Mosque because they regarded it as the center of Muslim communities in Metro Manila. Two national papers covered the demonstration of a few hundred people walking up Mendiola Street toward Malacañang Palace.<sup>27</sup> The people shouted their slogan, “Ang gusto namin ay katarungan, hindi pagtitiis. Ang lupa ay intended para sa Muslim sa Mindanao” (We want justice, not suffering. The land was intended for Muslims in Mindanao); they held up placards that read, “Justice, hindi just tiis” (Justice, not sufferance). The protesters also hoisted the MYSA’s flag that was emblazoned with the Muslim symbol of a crescent moon. Being aware of the press coverage, women put on headscarves, which they did not wear on a daily basis, and men draped shawls associated with Arabs. Many of them were Muslim college students studying in universities in Manila, including foreign nationals from Palestine and Jordan. There were a good many Arab students in Manila who supported the rallies financially by becoming a bridge between Arab businessmen and the associations. As such, Muslims began holding rallies by using elements such as pamphlets, slogans, flags, clothes, and prayers. These elements were often seen in student rallies in Metro Manila. Although they utilized these devices to fight without arms, their Muslim orientation was made evident in language and behavior, which were meant to represent themselves as “modern Muslims.” This representation aided in the further mobilization of Muslim youth. However, the most influential tool was the utilization of the mass media.

On the day before a rally, the MYSA representatives and the compound leaders would hold a press conference to state the size and objectives of the rally (*Manila Bulletin* 1994). They needed to publicize the rallies in order to sustain the attention of sympathizers and induce new ones. For their part, the mass media did not take either side but stayed neutral from first to last. Some tabloids wrote up the case as a religious war between Muslims and the



Fig. 3. Political meeting in the Salam Mosque Compound, 27 April 2006

INK, but these write-ups did not last. The national newspapers treated the issue as a land dispute between the two parties. Still, the media attention was fortunate for the Muslims, considering the political and economic influence of the INK, said a Muslim journalist who followed the issue (Usman 2005). He expressed the view that Muslims learned to utilize the mass media by voluntarily supplying the media with information and allowing them to become their spokesmen. Another executive officer of the MYSA told me that only the Muslim students in Manila, who had obtained advanced education in the capital city, could speak English and Tagalog fluently and succeed in drawing attention from the rest of Philippine society by holding press conferences; Muslims who lived in the province and did not receive higher education could not do the same (Gutoc-Tomawis 2005).

### Gender and Generational Differences in the Rallies

The activists in the compound all belonged to the generation who went to university or high school in the early 1990s, and were different from the generation that directly experienced the armed conflict in Mindanao. They were not from prominent political families, but from the rank and file. She-naida Salih, who was born in Manila and became a secretary general of the BYSA's chapter in the compound, reflected that, although she was angered

by the discrimination and human rights violations against Muslims, she enjoyed being involved in rallies and activities. Regarding the reason for joining rallies, she mentioned that transportation and food were free, and that she just wanted to join to have the experience. She accepted the invitation of a youth leader to bring her along to the rally. She also received some cash from the AFFI for joining the rally (Salih 2005). Mina Macote, who graduated from a private high school in Zamboanga and was studying nursing in a private college in Manila, said, "The organizing of the youth was not difficult for me because I had experienced it during practical trainings in my course," and joyfully described the experience of being hosed by the police. After graduating from college, Mina remained active in other organizations and rallies (Macote 2005). Abdul Adi, the younger brother of Ahmad who showed his injured knee in front of the Commission on Human Rights, told me that he joined them only because his brother called him in (Adi 2005).

In this way, the activists partook in the rallies for different reasons: for fun, for the new experience of participating in civil society, out of social obligation to families and friends, and getting extra income; the correction of injustice was only one among these various motivations (fig. 3).<sup>28</sup> These motivations differed from the ideologies of Islamic solidarity that the MYSA was trying to realize. McKenna (1998) has also noted the differences in motivations between leaders and ordinary members. The MNLF and MILF had been active since the 1970s and 1980s, and during his extended fieldwork in Cotabato City McKenna observed the disparities of motivation between the respective groups' top officials and the rank and file. The former, some of them traditional leaders, promoted ideologies of self-determination for the Bangsamoro, while the latter, the subordinates, did not support the separatist movement solely for that reason: "The idea of fighting for the Bangsamoro . . . was but one of those motivating factors and . . . not an especially potent one" (McKenna 1998, 286). A similar tendency was evident among the residents of the compound.

Disparities between generations existed as well. The main reason why the elderly joined the rallies was the fear of losing their residences. Other reasons included anger and the threat of the direct and indirect experiences of "having their land grabbed by kafir." In most of the cases, they told me that they had to show their *maratabat*, the Muslim pride as the ability to confront unjust powers. In fact, this key term was used by coordinators to mobilize the elderly (Hataman 2005).<sup>29</sup> Here lies the difference between those with and those without experience in the Mindanao conflict. For

instance, during the ninth demolition, the youth and students had put up a human barricade, but a few days before the event the majority Tausug elders had ferried in armalites and kept them in the madrasah building; they were armed and hiding behind the mosque. Whether holding arms meant they were willing to use the guns or it was just a performance to represent the “warlike Moro” could not be ascertained. Nevertheless, the two ways of fighting were symbolic. In the 1970s Muslims in Mindanao fought for secession and “self-determination of Bangsamoro” by taking up arms, whereas in the case of the compound in the 1990s they fought for the retrieval of the land and for justice through lawsuits and rallies. Born after his parents had moved to Manila, student activist Ahmad said that there was no other way to “fight” but to hold rallies. What divided the older and younger generations was People Power in 1986. The youth who organized rallies had witnessed as teenagers a nonviolent way to oust Marcos, and it was their only experience of a major upheaval in contrast to the generation of their parents who experienced firsthand the fiercest time of armed conflict in Mindanao.

Moreover, gender differences were evident as there were many female activists in the compound. The participation of women was attributed to the Islamic education of female Muslims carried out by the MYSA. Many women too had been attending high schools and colleges and were away from their parents who were in Mindanao; they were staying with relatives in the compound. Given the social regulation of the “Muslim woman” in their homeland in the south, it was conceivable that these educated women could be more active politically in Metro Manila than in their home provinces. In contrast, the males who participated in the rallies consisted only of the elderly of the SMMAC (who left their livelihood activities to their children), bachelors who had recently migrated to the capital to look for jobs, and students who had spare time. Many of the students, however, were studying in order to become police officers and public servants; they did not participate in the rallies either because they were banned from joining, or they simply avoided the risk of being expelled from their schools. Consequently, the ratio of men to women who were present at the rallies was almost equal, which was exceptional.

### **The Question of Unity**

The Moro secessionist and independence movements that arose in the 1970s constituted an endeavor to construct a Bangsamoro identity, which posited a

common history transcending the political, social, and cultural boundaries of the diverse ethnic groups that shared the Muslim religion. In the case of the Salam Mosque Compound, the multiethnic BYSA tried to do the same. They held gatherings in various mosques and gave seminars, tackling issues like problems in Mindanao and Moros in Muslim areas. Prominent Muslims were also invited to these discussions. The organizing of Muslim youth was enforced in the Tandang Sora compound, in Quiapo, and in other Muslim communities; and there were attempts at cross-area, cross-ethnic alignments.

Adiong declared, “The land dispute of Salam Mosque Compound was a lesson to history that Muslim in the Philippines should unite.” Indeed, the land dispute in the compound resulted in an unexpected triumph after a long struggle, which people credited to the unity among various Muslim ethnic groups. However, if there was unity it was temporary. In the five mosques and madrasah in Metro Manila, there is continuing segregation of ethnic groups. Within the compound itself the AFFI, MHRC, and MYSA are no longer active; all were dissolved without nurturing successor organizations.

### **Representing Muslimness in Metro Manila**

With the help of congressmen who were fellow Maranao, Adiong (1997) filed an impeachment case against the chief justice and the associate justices of the Supreme Court, accusing them of deliberately delaying the judgment of the case. A Committee on Muslim Affairs consisting of nine congressmen was organized in the tenth Congress through Resolution No. 1094 (Congress of the Republic of the Philippines House of Representatives 1997). The committee held three hearings from February to March 1997, inviting new and old members of the IDP and the party from the INK. The Muslim leaders in the compound organized themselves to support Adiong’s group at the hearings. The mobilization brought together nearly 3,000 Muslims from Metro Manila and other regions in front of the Batasang Pambansa. The ulama also participated. They claimed that the Quezon City Regional Trial Court and the Court of Appeals handed down wrong decisions, and that the committee should render the sale null and void. They also warned the Supreme Court against making a hasty decision. Here Adiong talks about the strategy during the hearings:

We had to show to the public that we were willing to die to retrieve our mosque and land. That was our consensus. All the Muslim asso-

ciations were cooperated. Muslim politicians and ulama in Mindanao wrote letters to the president and to the Congress saying, "Please do not take away the land, because we are ready to die. We will fight to the death." That was our strategy. Then we held a rally. We did so because, if not, we would have lost the case. . . . Some congressmen tried to convince me for a compromise, but I told them that I will not retreat unless Muslim wins the trial. I told them that if you let it stand, more blood will be shed and more violence will happen, and that will lead to a religious war or civil war in the Philippines. (Adiong 2005)

Whether the strategy above had direct effect on the ruling was unknown. In the decision of the Supreme Court rendered in May 1997, two voted in favor of the Muslims (among them was the chief justice), one for the INK (the judge was a member of the INK), and one justice abstained for political reasons (Adiong 2005; SCRA 1997). With this pattern of votes by the justices, the ownership of the controversial land was conferred on the Muslims after eight years of trial. It had seemed at first that the Muslims were going to lose the long-drawn court battle. Because of the possibility of losing their case, the strategy of bringing Muslimness to the forefront of public consciousness led to a legal victory.

McKenna (1998, 284) has written about the meaning of Muslimness in this way: "They are Muslims, they declare, because their forebears were Muslims, because they live in a Muslim homeland, and because they profess Islam." His interpretation is cogent, but what is interesting about the struggle for the compound is that the declaration of Muslimness took place outside the Muslim homeland in the southern Philippines; instead, it took place in the national capital where Muslims form a small minority. The distinctiveness of the struggle in Metro Manila is discussed in this section through an analysis of three modes of self-representation that Muslims deployed in the course of the land dispute.

#### "We are devoted Muslims": Waqf, Shariah, and the Muslim world

First, by representing himself and those involved in the land struggle as "devoted Muslims" or "true Muslims" Adiong obtained financial assistance and moral support from Muslim countries more effectively than from local Muslims. He was able to use Islamic discourses to promote his cause. He insisted that the land was a waqf and that Shariah did not admit it to be an

object of commerce. Although Philippine legislation had no description of waqf, it recognized "freedom of religion"; thus, Adiong wove the idea of waqf into the definition of freedom of religion enshrined in the constitution and insisted that it was the right and obligation of every Muslim to keep the rule of waqf. A letter from the Libyan embassy to the mayor of Quezon City fortified this position on waqf. The letter stressed that the land was donated by Libya's government for the sake of Muslim Filipinos, and requested the mayor to watch over the land lest it fall into someone else's hands or used for other purposes. The letter also functioned as a form of diplomatic pressure (Adiong 2005).

#### "Let us recover our pride": Islamic solidarity and common memory in Mindanao

Whereas the court case was fought between a few people, Adiong and his group shifted the terms of the dispute by turning it into an interreligious contest between the "Muslim community" and the INK. This enabled rally coordinators to persuade other believers to think that they were beneficiaries of waqf, and to boost mobilization efforts in Metro Manila and Mindanao. They also made the point that the Muslim land in Quezon City was going to be taken away by another religious group, and stressed that the torment of one Muslim was a torment of the whole Muslim society. Thus they succeeded in upgrading the case to the level of *ummah* (Muslim community in the world) and calling for Islamic solidarity among their members.

Moreover, they drew upon symbolic resources in the common memory of Moros in Mindanao. During the American colonial period and in the 1950s, thousands of Christian settlers from Luzon and the Visayas arrived in Mindanao and "grabbed" their land legally. This historic dispossession remains a potent issue even today (Ishii 2001). It was partly on the basis of this common memory of loss that MNLF leader Nur Misuari was able to construct the idea of Bangsamoro as Muslims having a collective identity bound by shared experiences.<sup>31</sup> Analogously, the rally coordinators retold the compound dispute by using the idiom of the Moros' common memory of dispossession to attract elderly participants and cement their solidarity. Regaining the land was equivalent to recovering their Moro pride. Nevertheless, these symbolic resources were less salient among the youth whose self-representations revolved around the image of a modern Muslim. This image enabled participation in rallies not only by Muslim students involved

in political movements but also by playful youth who were not really concerned about politics.

### “We are warriors”: Utilization of a Muslim stereotype

The utility of Muslimness became most operative in confronting mainstream society. Playing on Filipino public perception of Muslims as jihadists, Adiong reminded a judge of the court at the SEC before the decision was reached, “If you will make Muslim lose, there will be a religious war.” Other Muslim leaders warned in public that violence would be provoked if they lost. Knowing that the Christian majority believed the stereotype of the Moro as a “barbarian with no law and order,” and most probably of the Moro as juramentado, they used this very stereotype to achieve their aims.

The young, however, hesitated to use the image of “Moro.” Their thoughts may be represented in this statement by Adi (2005): “Moros are people who are ignorant, but they can be Filipino Muslim when they are educated.” Although he expressed some sympathy for the way the elders fought in order to stop the ninth demolition, he distinguished the elders from the youth in terms of the different means they employed to block the squads, with the youth using “civilized” and urban Muslim practices. Yet, many other participants seemed not to be aware of the different strategies that the mobilizers used, but were attracted by the different languages and images that the leaders utilized, a topic that requires further investigation.

### The Hybridity of Strategic Essentialism

The strategic counteruse of a Moro stereotype, however, is a double-edged sword. Furuya (2001, 174) states that, although strategic essentialism empowers the suppressed and marginalized people in a certain context, it functions repressively if it is entrenched as an extreme and eternal strategy. In the case of the Salam Mosque Compound, Muslims were able to protect the land, but they unwittingly reinforced the image of Philippine Muslims as “barbarian and war-freak.” It served to further consolidate stereotypical views of the Moro and widen the psychological distance between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Philippines. All the same, this deployment of the stereotype is one of the characteristics of Muslim practices in Metro Manila in their desire to obtain justice in the Philippines.

The uniqueness of this strategic essentialism is that it emerged in immigrant Metro Manila. It turned their struggle into a hybrid one, taking in



Fig. 4. Man watching basketball game after praying at the mosque, c. 2002



Fig. 5. Entertainment during a wedding preparation, 2 June 2006

the culture of collective movements in the capital region. As Furuya (2001) notes, hybridity or any combination of seemingly contradictory tactics is a strategy in itself. As we have seen in the struggle for the Salam Mosque Compound, Muslims combined their self-representation as “barbarian and war-freak” with the active use of mass media as well as the rallies of civil society. The incoherence of the elderly “fighting with guns” and the student youth building unarmed human barricades can be another example. In this way, Muslims “made do” with the locus of the other and eventually the mobilization emerged in what Appadurai (1996) calls as an “ethnoscape,” turning other people’s land into theirs.

In material terms, the people of the Salam Mosque Compound obtained their land and gained a measure of self-determination (fig. 4 and fig. 5). However, this gain has been threatened by changes in the national and international situation. Since the bombing of the Light Rail Transit in December 2000, police and army personnel have been conducting raids in the compound, and residents have been taken to police custody without warrants of arrest and without evidence (*USA Today* 2001; *Bulatlat* 2002). Injustices toward Muslims in Metro Manila have not been redressed, but will continue to shape their collective imagination and action in the years to come.

## Abbreviations Used

<b>AFFI</b>	Al-Fatihah Foundation, Inc.
<b>BYSA</b>	Bangsamoro Youth and Student Association
<b>IDCP</b>	Islamic Dawwah Council of the Philippines
<b>IDP</b>	Islamic Directorate of the Philippines
<b>INK</b>	Iglesia ni Kristo
<b>MHRC</b>	Moro Human Rights Center
<b>MILF</b>	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
<b>MNLF</b>	Moro National Liberation Front
<b>MYSA</b>	Muslim Youth and Student Alliance
<b>SEC</b>	Securities and Exchange Commission
<b>SCRA</b>	<i>Supreme Court Reports Annotated</i>
<b>SMMAC</b>	Salam Mosque and Madrasah Advisory Council, Inc.

## Notes

- 1 Movements by indigenous peoples included the oppositions to large-scale public and private development works, the claims for compensations for their loss, and above all the struggles to recover the rights to their “traditional” lands.
- 2 Bricolage is similar to what Certeau (1988) calls “tactics” in which people can change their positions in different contexts.
- 3 This study is based on oral histories gathered mostly inside and outside of the Salam Mosque Compound from June to August 2005. Some of the stories were collected earlier, between 2002 and 2004. To supplement the narratives I traced documents in newspapers and in university and public libraries at both the local and national government levels.
- 4 Nur Misuari, the leader of the MNLF that was established in 1972, had reclaimed the derogatory term “Moro,” first introduced by Spaniards and subsequently used by Americans. Misuari propounded the vision of a new, integrative nation of Moros in the Philippines by adding the prefix *bangsa* (nation), hence, Bangsamoro.
- 5 Different figures are stated in the censuses and in documents from the Office on Muslim Affairs. The latter uses the figure of 5 million people according to “their calculation.” (Interview with a personnel in the Bureau of Human Settlement, Office on Muslim Affairs, in July 2002).
- 6 See, among others, Saleeby 1913; Alonto et al. 1955; George 1980; Turner 1992; and Jubair 1999.
- 7 For details, see Hassan 1983; Matuan 1985; Kadil 1985; and Watanabe 2007.
- 8 The IDP was a nonpartisan and federal organization, whose members included: (1) the Muslim Association of the Philippines and its president, Congressman Domocao Alonto; (2) the Ansar Islam of the Philippines and its leader; (3) the Islamic Supreme Council and its leader, Governor Ali Dimaporo of Lanao; (4) the Royal Sultanate of Lanao and its president, Rashid Lucman (also leader of the Blackshirt, an anti-Christian guerilla); (5) Mayor Aminkadra Abubakar of Jolo, Sulu; (6) Congressman Indanan Anni of Siasi, Tawi-Tawi; (7) the MNLF and its leaders, Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim; (8) the Commission of National Integration under the Office of the President and its head, Commissioner Mama Sinsuat; (9) the Institute of Islamic Studies in the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and its dean, Dr. Cesar Majul; and (10) the Federation of Philippine Muslim Lawyers and its president, Sen. Mamintal Tamano. There were fifteen board members, including engineer Faurok Carpiso, Musib Buat, Kunug Punbaya, and Adm. Carel Sidre of the Southern Police District (a convert to Islam and nephew of Imelda Marcos). Macapanto Abbas was the IDP’s secretary general (Lucman 2000; Jubair 1999).
- 9 As of 1971, P1 was equivalent to US\$6.40 (Wong 2000).
- 10 In the Philippines every association or organization must be registered as a corporate body with the SEC.
- 11 This name is a pseudonym.
- 12 To make matters worse, the sudden death of Minister Bouyasir in an airplane crash in Sinai in 1971 made Muslim Filipinos lose their main financial supporter.
- 13 In 1982 the Commission of Muslim Affairs was upgraded to become the Ministry of Muslim Affairs. Its head was again Mr. Romulo Espaldon.

- 14 Atty. Ali Abubakar (not his real name) was also secretary general of the Converts to Islam Society of the Philippines (Convislam) (Ministry of Muslim Affairs 1981, 18).
- 15 On 27 July 1982 an inauguration ceremony was held in the mosque together with the Eid al Fitr festival (Ministry of Muslim Affairs 1982, 12; *Manila Bulletin* 1982).
- 16 The Maranao called this land as the "Targan Village," meaning the "village over there." See *Manila Bulletin* 1988.
- 17 These names are pseudonyms.
- 18 This name is a pseudonym.
- 19 Fiscal Basa was a government employee and hesitated to bring a suit against the vendors and the INK. He became a moral supporter instead.
- 20 *Juramentado* refers to a Moro suicide fighter whose practice became famous from the war against Spain and America (Lucman 2000). A protest movement by Muslim youths in Manila that turned out to be violent was covered on the front page of a major national newspaper (*Manila Bulletin* 1969).
- 21 Funded initially from sources in Germany and then in Australia, the AFFI was established in the late 1980s. It conducted interreligious dialogue in elementary schools, developed health care programs for Moro urban poor, and carried out community organizing in Muslim areas in Metro Manila. Although the two top executives of the AFFI were Christians, ordinary members included many Muslim students, including those from foreign countries, according to Jolly Lais (2005), a former member of the AFFI. The Moro Human Rights Center (MHRC) watched over the human rights violations against Manila Muslims by government agencies. It was set up as a rescue organization and had close contact with the Commission on Human Rights (Gaerlan 2005; MHRC 2005). Erwin Gaerlan was formerly the head of the MHRC. The organization that the later Muslim congressman, Mujib S. Hataman, joined during his college years was the BYSA, which was able to form chapters in major Muslim areas in the capital region (such as in Maharlika Village in Taguig and in Quiapo, Patayas, and Novaliches) and conduct regional networking among them through its representatives. The BYSA held protest rallies on Muslim issues, such as the nonhumanitarian treatment by the government and police of Muslim individuals and communities in Manila, as well as other social issues, such as tuition fee increases and the price of crude oil. Moreover, it conducted seminars in various Muslim communities on political problems and the Moro's historical predicaments (Gutoc-Tomawis 2005; Hataman 2005).
- 22 Under the SMMAC the ethnic groups, whose number was later increased to seven, were also organized to solve internal issues and disputes.
- 23 The names used in this article are pseudonyms, but Nurifa and Fatima are Maguindanaon, Shenaida is a Sama, and Mina and Ahmad are Tausug.
- 24 Ahmad mentioned the leftist group's involvement but failed to identify it.
- 25 The MYSA was concerned with various Muslim related issues such as the Mindanao conflict, human rights violations, the Muslim position in Philippine politics, and Muslim self-determination.
- 26 Samira Gutoc-Tomawis was then the leader of the MYSA.
- 27 Mendiola Street has been famous for being the venue for protest actions against an incumbent government (*Wikipedia* 2005). Ahmad narrated this demonstration, but he could not recall its approximate date. I could not find any newspaper account that covered this event.

- 28 People have different reasons for participating in a movement. Tarrow (1998, 5–6) argues that, although there must be a common interest or claim against opponents, authorities, or elites, the reasons for participation vary (such as juvenile desire to flout authority, vicious instincts of the mob, a spirit of play and carnival, grim frenzy of the mob, and so on).
- 29 On *maratabat* see Riemer 1987.
- 30 However, the definition of Bangsamoro set by Nur Misuari included non-Muslim indigenous peoples in Mindanao, who identified themselves as such.

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