

COMMENTARY

Mindanao (Philippines): 44 expertly-trained policemen killed by Moro rebels - But what shall we do with the #Fallen120000?

Tuesday 3 February 2015, by [DOCENA Herbert](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2015).

"There can be no peace without justice. We must not be held hostage by our desire for peace and allow the massacre to remain unpunished." - Inquirer editorial 1/31/15

QUEZON CITY (MindaNews/01 Feb) — Yes, let us not allow the massacre to remain unpunished.

But which massacres—and where?

The 'massacre' in Mamapasano, Maguindanao in January 2015, when 44 fully-armed, expertly-trained policemen — protected by 350 other policemen and up to 125,000 soldiers, with their fighter jets, their surveillance drones, their standby helicopters, and their Pentagon-issued trainers/supervisors—were killed by Moro rebels?

Certainly. Doesn't that even go without saying?

But what about that massacre in Carmen, North Cotabato in June 1971, when up to 65 Moros, including lolos, lolas, and children—they who had no soldiers to call on, no GI Joes to radio for med evacs — were mowed down by Philippine Constabulary-sponsored Ilaga vigilantes, their ears chopped off and hung like pendants around their killers' necks'?

Or what about that massacre in Maimbung, Sulu in January 2006, of a family living in a small hut we visited deep in the jungle, shot in close range by men in fatigue uniforms according to witnesses: one of the many massacres too ordinary to even warrant investigation, too routine to even be reported in Manila's newspapers?

Which massacres shall we punish and which massacre shall we forget?

Yes, let us go to the bottom of things and establish "accountability."

But where do we start as we begin to assign guilt?

Do we start with those shots fired back by the Moro residents of Mamasapano as — out of nowhere, when a ceasefire agreement is supposed to be in place, and when painstakingly-negotiated coordination mechanisms agreed by both the Philippine government and the MILF are supposed to be strictly observed — over 400 highly armed elite troops landed in their village and began firing on their houses?

Or do we start with those initial shots fired by those elite troops who appeared out of nowhere — in a clear violation of the agreements?

Do we start on January 25, 2015 when all this happened?

Or do we start on March 18, 1968 when an unknown number of Moros — some say 11, some say 200 — were brought, after a botched plan to invade Sabah, to an airstrip in Corregidor and executed with machine guns by their military handlers—a massacre now immortalized as the Jabidah massacre?

Do we start in 2011 during the Al-Barka clashes when soldiers out to make arrests in Moro territory were attacked by Moro rebels?

Or do we start sometime in the 1920s or 1930s when, after incorporating the Moro people and the lumads, into the post-colonial Philippine state by northern Filipino ruling elites, the Philippine government began laying the foundations for the largest mass resettlement program in Philippine history, driving tens of thousands of landless Christian families from the North to settle in the ‘uninhabited’ lands of Mindanao so that they stop fighting for a piece of the haciendas in Tarlac or Negros?

Do we start in the 1970s when Moros finally organized and armed themselves to fight back against this creeping form of settler colonialism — different only from the Algerian or American version by the fact that the settlers were of the same skin tone?

Or do we start in the 1950s when the Philippine state expanded what one noted Mindanao scholar called a “low-intensity ethnic cleansing”?

Yes, let us go after the “terrorists” and those who “coddle” them.

But which terrorists? That terrorist that bombed a hotel with scores of innocent civilians, and that may now be plotting, in the highlands of Maguindanao to hijack that airplane — a terrorist with no passport and just a backpack full of chemicals and explosive resentments behind him? Yes, by all means, let us go and get him!

But what about those who scorched Jolo to the ground in February 1974 and killed an estimated 10,000 Tausugs — a thousand uniformed ‘Marwans’ with an entire state behind them?

Or what about those who drove over 1,000 Tausug — men, women, infants — up to the peak of Mount Bud Dahu in 1906, then surrounded and slaughtered all of them there—a thousand white ‘Abu Usmans’ with an entire empire behind them?

How can we go and get them? What shall we do with those who coddle them?

Yes, let us “negotiate only with the ‘good Moros.’” Let us talk only to the “respectable freedom-fighters.”

But could we also ensure that those ‘good Moros’ only negotiate with the ‘good Filipinos’ rather than with the likes of Ferdinand Marcos, who unleashed the murderous Ilagas and Barracudas upon them; Manuel Quezon, who spearheaded the large-scale resettlement program and investment policies that kicked thousands of Moros out of their lands — or Norberto Manero who ate their ears for breakfast?

How do we ensure that they never have to negotiate with Filipinos who think that “the only good Moro is a dead Moro”?

And how do we answer them if they ask, as many have: what gives the colonizers the moral or legal right to decide who from among the colonized they want to consider as “partners”? How did you

Filipinos react when the Spanish only wanted to talk to their chosen Filipinos — not to Rizal or Bonifacio?

Yes, by all means, let us have a day of mourning for the #Fallen44.

But what shall we do with the #Fallen120000?

Today, it is important to raise these difficult, morally fraught questions—and to confront them in their raw and violent complexity — because more powerful and better-organized political forces out there are buying for simple answers, simple solutions.

Right-wing nationalists screaming for revenge think everything will be alright if only the MILF in particular and the Bangsamoro in general are made to pay, by taking back whatever limited concessions they may have won in the peace talks, by reasserting that “Mindanao is part of Philippine territory,” and by forcefully reminding those who dare question this supposedly natural God-given fact who the real masters are—even if this will mean renewed fighting that could kill tens of thousands more.

Some center-left liberals who seek calm for the sake of commerce or economic growth, on the other, seem to reduce this conflict into a simple technical or management question, something that could be solved if only the so-called “conflict strings” were broken, if only a “strong state” reasserts itself, and if only the right laws are passed and the right institutions are engineered so as to undermine the opportunities for “violence entrepreneurs” in Mindanao—as if the very strength of that state, of a backward colonialist state, had not bred those opportunities for violence-peddlers to begin with.

Agonizing as it may be, we need to stand humbly before all these fraught, painful questions because the problem in Mindanao is neither just a military, a legal, or an institutional problem—something that could be solved by increased firepower, policy formulation or institutional reengineering. It is ultimately and inescapably a moral problem: something that could only be solved by resolving broader questions of power and justice—and thus, something, that could only be solved through politics in the broader sense of the term: politics not as wheeling and dealing, but politics as the struggle over how we should live with our fellow human beings, over how should organize our society so we can live the “good life”—the kind of politics that people will kill and die for.

And only if we build the social force, only if we build the popular power behind the kind of society we want—a society in which all lives are equally valuable and grievable—can our desire for peace be finally liberating.

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P.S.

* “But what shall we do with the #Fallen120000?”. Minda News. February 1 2015 4:24 pm:
<http://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2015/02/01/commentary-but-what-shall-we-do-with-the-fallen120000/>

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