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**NEOLIBERALISM AND THE MORO STRUGGLE IN
SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

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Abstract: This paper aims to elucidate the Moro resistance via a critique of neoliberalism. Taking the views of various scholars, I will argue that neoliberalism is reducible to three themes: liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. Neoliberalism with its themes has highly conditioned both the current Islamic resistance the world over, and specifically, Moro resistance in southern Philippines. By forwarding this position, I will be able to clarify two important points. First, I wish to demystify current propaganda (first advanced by the American imperialists) that the Moro struggle is a Muslim or Islamic struggle. Delinking the notions of Moro struggle and Islam, this paper shall hopefully dispel the culture of Islamophobia common among uninformed Filipinos. Second, I hope to highlight the necessity of the Moro resistance to assume a political character, one which resists neoliberal capitalism. This suggests a critical appreciation of national policies, both past and current, which unfairly favor foreign multinational and transnational companies at the expense of the interests of the Moros and other indigenous peoples in southern Philippines. This characterization of the Moro resistance as a political struggle could have crucial implications to both the ongoing peace process and the need to establish a solid unity among the Moro peoples. At the heart of all these is the need to remedy and rectify historical maladies rooted on socio-economic exploitation perpetuated by foreign powers against the Moros.

Key words: Moros, muslim, MILF, MNLF, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, terrorism, Maute, peace process, Mindanao

1. Introduction

The Philippines is a nation in perennial turmoil. Social unrests continue to rock the nation, especially in its southern island, Mindanao. The secessionist movement of the *Moros*, of whose fight could still be traced back to the valiant battles waged by independent sultanates against the Spanish and American colonialists, continues. The MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) and the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front), in a much recent past, have mobilized thousands among their ranks and waged secessionist wars against the central government of the Philippines, in order to assert independence of what they deemed as the *Bangsamoro*. Peace has been so evasive in the island of Mindanao.

Extremist terror has likewise plagued the island of Mindanao. Offshoots of either of the two *Moro* movements have transformed into infamous terror groups. There is the notorious *Abu Sayyaf* group of whose terroristic activities were erroneously justified through the Islamic notion of the *jihād* (Liow 2006, 16). And just this 2017, a supposed ISIS-inspired clan called *Maute* sieged the Islamic City of Marawi in order to supposedly build a Caliphate in the region (Fonbuena 2017). The atrocities of the latter prompted President Duterte to declare Martial Law in the entire island of Mindanao.

This paper aims to elucidate the *Moro* resistance via a critique of neoliberalism. It will trace how neoliberalism has sparked resistance movements the world over and in the Philippines, especially among the *Moros*. The paper will also present alternatives as to how the current *Moro* struggle be regarded as a political resistance against neoliberalism.

2. Neoliberalism and Islam: The Market Economy and Muslim Resistance

As a global force, neoliberalism has permeated human existence yet, as we shall see, it has not actually alleviated the human condition but has pushed it to an unspeakable state of poverty. It is the aim of this section to analyze what neoliberalism means and how it has affected select Muslim societies.

2.1. Neoliberal Themes

David Harvey has argued that neoliberalism is “a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of the economic elites”. While majority of the world population in the post-war years suffered appalling economic conditions, neoliber-

ralism's implementation has succeeded in securing and, more importantly, monopolizing power among a few business interests. Neoliberalism is clearly capitalism's response to the problems it internally created and suffered. This response takes the form of saving a crises-stricken economic system, thereby putting premium on the progress of capital and profit over the needs of ordinary people. Harvey contended that neoliberalism "has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances... creating, the power of economic elite" (Harvey 2005a, 19).

In advancing its aims, neoliberal architects in the industrialized countries, all throughout the period from its initial implementation in the 1970's up to the present, unwaveringly followed and implemented the model of the LPD: liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. This same model was also forcefully imposed on developing countries.

Liberalization, privatization, and deregulation were clarified by Chomsky (1999, 20) when he pointed out neoliberalism's rules. The first rule is to "liberalize trade and finance". Neoliberalism must guarantee the free flow of capital, commodities, services, and technologies as these cross transnational boundaries. The second is to "let markets set price". This essentially deregulates sovereign governments and restricts them from interfering on issues that concern the market. What is presupposed here is that the market is better managed if business interests are left freely to themselves to decide their own fate. The last rule is to "privatize" industries and services originally considered as public utilities (e.g. education, health, water, and housing, among others). With privatization, neoliberalism has fully integrated "human needs into the profit-making process" (Chang 2005, 251). As neoliberalism perpetuates a users-pay philosophy, formerly state-owned or nationalized properties are auctioned wholesale, as neoliberal experts deemed that these can be run more efficiently by profit-raking business interests.

2.2. Neoliberalism and Islamic Resistance

Neoliberalism's global aggression prompted various responses from Muslim societies. At the heart of these responses is the collective desire of an oppressed people to break the shackles of neoliberalism. This section will discuss resistance movements in select Muslim societies, and will further clarify neoliberalism and the possibility of an Islamic resistance.

Aoudé made an analysis of the neoliberal structural adjustments in Egypt and how the discontent caused by the latter eventually resulted to an uprising. The contradiction between the Egyptian people and the Mubarak regime was viewed as a resistance movement of an oppressed people against bureaucrat capitalists bending state policies to respond to neoliberal demands. Aoudé (2013, 245) argued that "[p]rivatizing the public sector constituted the core of those economic policies that had been perpetrated by a regime that promoted parasitic capital both local and

global”. Neoliberal intrusions to Egypt were institutionalized when “[t]he IMF conditions force the government to cut spending on social services, relax price controls, cut subsidies, deregulate and privatize industries, target inflation, and liberalize capital flows” (Maher as quoted by Aoudé 2013, 245). Even the World Bank’s own assessment of the effects of the structural adjustments sourly painted the experience of the Egyptian people. It said that “[s]pecifically, privatization had the following costs associated with it: First, major layoffs in the public and governmental sectors. Second, price inflation. Third, dwindling social services as a consequence of budget cuts” (Aoudé 2013, 246).

Ultimately, the Egyptian people decided to rewrite history by overthrowing a leader whose regime was marked by an unflinching subservience to neoliberalism.

In Iraq, after successfully deposing the sovereign and assertive regime of Saddam Hussein, the former Bush administration envisioned to confer the precious gift of freedom to the Iraqi people. But as to what that notion of freedom means remained unclear until 19 September 2003, when the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority Paul Bremer announced “the full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign firms of Iraqi businesses, full repatriation of foreign profits... the opening of Iraq’s banks to foreign control, national treatment for foreign companies and... the elimination of nearly all trade barriers” (as quoted by Harvey 2005b, 7). This freedom means the further flourishing of global capital while simultaneously undermining and attacking the democratic interests of the Iraqi people. Inevitably, a resistance movement ensued, forcing the same hegemonic power to withdraw from Iraq (Aoude 2013, 242).

Gills similarly linked the Muslim resistance with neoliberal globalization. He strikingly stressed that these resistance movements are moments *of* and a reaction *to* neoliberal globalization (Gills 2000, 243). He explained that while such movements are aspects of globalization, these as well display heterodox pictures of Islamic politics which are variously conditioned by differing socio-cultural particularities (244). The aforementioned resistance movements in Egypt and Syria, not to mention the enduring struggle of the *Moros* in the Philippines, have varying roots which cannot be lumped under a singular heading of Islamic fundamentalism as they portray distinctive demands emanating from specific contexts.

Iribarnegaray and Jenkins likewise pointed out the immorality of neoliberalism, and how such a political economic system conditions the resistance movements of Muslims around the world, including the extremist and terroristic ones. While the two categorically denounced the evils of terrorism, and we must similarly denounce this as such, they however presented some reasons why young men are enticed to join in such networks. Three reasons were explained yet strikingly significant, at

least in this research, is the hope devotees placed under a theocratic system of a new Caliphate which they believe would better address the socio-economic sufferings experienced under a neoliberal system (Iribarnegaray and Jenkins 2016, 518).

Neoliberalism imposes a hegemonic world agenda and creates a world patterned according to a singular design which perfectly fits to the economic ends of the autonomous market. Practices which do not meet the profit-oriented ends of the market are regarded as outmoded, traditional, or if not, recalcitrant or subversive and therefore worthy of destruction (the Islamic City of Marawi, which will be discussed in the next section, fits in this sense). Anything which is not marketable (i.e. nationalized oil industries, social ownership of agricultural plantations, publicly owned and operated education and health services, among others) are seen as threats to a globalized world. With this hegemonic drive of neoliberalism in place, resistance becomes a necessity.

3. Neoliberalism and the Philippine Experience: Structural Adjustments and the Moro Resistance

Various researchers have tackled the neoliberal themes of LPD as a global phenomenon (Harvey 2005a, 19-31; Chomsky 1999, 19-34; Carroll & Carson 2006, 51-65). Mainly orchestrated by the imperialist powers like the G-7 (Mananzan as quoted by Lindio-McGovern 2007, 15), neoliberalism's reach and hold upon peripheral nations was certain. Chang would see no exemption among Asian and South-East Asian countries from being affected of this global reconfiguration. He further discussed that "[s]ince the 1980s, these countries have witnessed gradual integration into neoliberal-driven globalization, while abandoning the nationalist-protectionist import-substitution development strategy" (Chang 2005, 251).

3.1. The Philippines and the Onslaught of Neoliberalism

The Philippines, being a former colony – and still a neocolony – of the US, has made significant restructurings in its socio-economic policies to respond to the global demands of neoliberalism. Africa (2016) explained that "the Martial Law regime [1972-1986] started the market-oriented restructuring of the Philippine economy and its debilitating effects were immediately felt". He continued that "the Marcos regime implemented the neoliberal economic policies demanded by the US-dominated IMF and WB [World Bank] in exchange for a share in the foreign loans and comprador business opportunities". As national assets were then redistributed by the dictator among his close allies and friends, there was in the Martial Law years the perfect blending of neoliberalism and crony capitalism.

Together with the acceptance of the neoliberal doctrine among developing countries was the compulsion to adjust local structural programs. While developing countries during the debt crisis were defaulting on loans, these same countries however highly needed foreign aid to augment domestic spending. Caught within a cycle of dependency, developing countries like the Philippines inevitably succumbed to disadvantageous deals. Seeing the situation as an opportune time to impose reforms (i.e. elimination or reduction of trade barriers, privatizing of public assets, flexibilization of labor, among others) “the World Bank and International Monetary Fund made new loans conditional on neoliberal reforms...” (Bockman 2013, 15). The Philippines under the Marcos regime availed twice of World Bank’s structural adjustment loans: one in 1980 and another in 1984, worth US\$200 million and US\$302 million, respectively. Such loans were loaded with conditionalities that “included among others tariff cuts, removal of import licenses and quantitative restrictions, lowering protections, and export-promotion...” (Africa 2016).

Succeeding regimes described as post-Marcos administrations to contrast themselves with the authoritarian rule of Marcos never really retracted the neoliberal programs initiated during the 1970’s. As mere continuation of the neocolonial policies (like parity rights of the Bell Trade Act) set before the Marcos era, these neoliberal programs were intensified by the outright acceptance of the neoliberal dictates of the WTO [World Trade Organization]. JP Morgan, a renowned pro-neoliberal and finance institution, openly commended the economic prospects of the current Duterte administration (Philippine News Agency 2017). As a matter of fact, critics have exposed how the current administration has merely recycled dilapidated neoliberal doctrines (Ibon, 2017; Padilla, 2017; Africa, 2017a; & Africa, 2017b).

The Philippines’ subservience to neoliberalism has highly undermined and reduced the former to being a dependent nation waiting for spoils from industrialized countries. San Juan (2016, 82), echoing the position of Dependency Theory scholars, expressed that “industrialized countries exploit poor countries through economic and political neo-colonialism which perpetuate the latter’s pre-industrial or semi-industrial status”. Ever since it received the Philippines from Spain in 1898, the US has transformed the Philippines as a reservoir of cheap raw materials and labor force, and a submissive market for its exported surplus goods and capital. Further, neoliberalism “has allowed the plunder of the forest, mineral, marine and other natural resources of the [Philippines] by foreign monopoly capitalists and by the bureaucrat big comprador-landlords. It has ruined the agricultural production of domestic food staples in favor of foreign-owned plantations for the export of fruit as well as for biofuel production” (Sison, 2013).

The neoliberal plunder of natural resources is most rampant in big mining industries scattered across the archipelago, majority of which are foreign owned. In a country “with natural resources valued at almost USD 1 trillion, ranks fifth in the world in terms of mineral resources,” (Camba 2016, 69) the proliferation of extractive industries is but inevitable. In fact, this has been the development paradigm treaded by the Philippines, with the firm belief that economic development be accelerated by encouraging foreign direct investment of multinational mining companies (Holden 2013, 58). This model has in fact fatal consequences in a nation which is frequently hit by El Niño. As Olden (2013, 72) further discussed, “El Niño induced drought is a hazard impacting the Philippines and some El Niño events... have occasioned substantial difficulties for the rural poor in areas affected by them. Large-scale mining projects... occasion a substantial potential to aggravate the hazards posed by El Niño induced drought through their disruption of groundwater resources”.

As these mining industries continue to wreak havoc on the lives of the rural poor, resistance likewise sharpens. Even the Church, defending the rural poor, took a critical stand in relation to the development aggression unleashed by mining industries (Holden 2012, 844-849). Holden (2012, 850) explained that “the church rejects the view of the government that mining can serve as an agent of development... mining will not bring development and it will not elevate the poor from poverty.” Several researches have analyzed the destructive consequences of neoliberalism in the Philippines (Goldstein et al. 2011, 112-131; Pacquing 2017, 129-148; San Juan 2016, 80-110).

3.2. Neoliberalism and the Moro Resistance in the Philippines

The *Moro* peoples of Mindanao have sustained vigorous battles against colonialisms and other forms of aggression. The Spanish colonial forces did not totally succeed in subjugating the natives of then *Las Islas Filipinas* as the peoples in the southern Philippines, mostly Muslims, valiantly resisted three centuries of Spanish intrusion and Christian proselytizing. Thus, the said peoples gained a mark of notoriety and were thereby labelled as *Moros*. Likewise, during the American colonial period, the *Moros* staged resistances which however were violently suppressed by the Americans, thus resulting to infamous massacres, and the gradual subjugation and integration of the *Moro* people to the new colonial power. While some of the *Moros* formally accepted and bowed to American colonial rule, still others persevered in the struggle. The legacy of such a resistance was then passed on from one generation to another, thus fortifying a culture of defiance which persistently asserted the right to self-determination. The *Moro* resistance movement is described as “the

largest and most persistent armed separatist conflict in Southeast Asia” (Tan as quoted by Liow 2006, 8).

I use the plural form peoples rather than the singular as I start from the premise that the *Moro* peoples, as defiant as they are, still lack a collective struggle united under a single banner of an emancipatory politics. While I do not claim that the *Moros* have not achieved a certain level of unity, their unity however has not translated into a powerful ideological, political, and organizational force which importantly endures through time. In a well-researched work, Tan (1973, 133) decades ago, was able to highlight historical patterns of disunity or fragmentation among *Moros* in Mindanao. This view was later reiterated by Liow (2006, 9) when he clarified that prior to “the late 1960s, the Islamized tribes in the Philippines were scattered, separate sultanates battling not only colonial authority but also each other”. And with the contemporary trend of fragmentation of *Moro* resistance groups, from the MNLF, to the MILF, and the recently formed BIFF (*Bangsamoro* Islamic Freedom Fighters), the points raised by Tan and Liow still seem to hold true. Legacies of valiance may have been passed and inherited later on, but fragmentation and disunity proved inevitable for a variety of speculated reasons (11).

I likewise use the term *Moro* rather than Muslims to correct and properly portray the substance of the said movement i.e. an ethno-nationalist movement for self-determination. This characterization has two important implications.

First, the religious characterization of the *Moro* movement, an ideological construct first employed by the American colonial period (McKenna as quoted by Liow 2006, 8) and continued by the succeeding central governments, aims to malign the Muslim people of Mindanao and thereby confuse the real nature of the *Moro* struggle. Col. Finley, the former Governor of Zamboanga District, a *Moro* Province during the American Colonial Period, wrote a revealing research in regard to the issue. Pejoratively titled *The Mohammedan Problem in the Philippines*, Finley (1916, 32) expressed that the American colonialists simply “accepted the dictum of Spain and of the Roman Catholic Church, that the *Moros* were savages and should be treated accordingly”. They justified their biased attitude towards the *Moros* and ended up believing and upholding the insulting notion that “a good *Moro* was a dead one (42)”.

Finley likewise (33) admitted how the “Filipino politicians and some Americans are strangely obsessed with the idea” of eradicating the *Moro* “by legislative enactment, and a change of tribal designation”. The creation therefore of what was supposed to be a *Moro* province then is already suspect of the central colonial government’s despicable agenda. Finley concluded that leaders “never succeeded in governing the *Moros*, mainly because of the religious intolerance of the Filipino”. Here, Finley did not just enforce a dichotomy between the *Moro* and the Filipino, he likewise reinforced the mistaken notion that the latter ought to govern

the former. Furthermore, the statement's particular stress on religious intolerance, and the article's general emphasis on the Mohammedan problem effectively supported the erroneous characterization of the *Moro* condition as an absolutely religious (and problematic) one. Here, the Islamophobic tendencies are successfully laid down. While this assessment is merely coming from a single American official, its message could not be belittled as it speaks of what then was considered as a policy against the *Moro* peoples. Majul (2010, 55) however confirmed that "American occupation did not do much to erase the old prejudices that the Christians had of the Muslims."

Current proposals like the Muslim-only ID scheme both reinforce Islamophobia and the distorted depiction of the *Moro* struggle as religiously-instigated. Resulting from the rising tensions between the supposed ISIS-influenced *Maute* group in Marawi City and the Philippine Government, the latter decided to impose a Muslim ID system "to identify alleged terror personalities in a bid to avoid spillover of the Marawi crisis (CNN Philippines Staff 2017)". The proposed measure, reminiscent of the identification system the Nazis imposed upon the Jews, merely instigates religious bigotry and the misconception that Muslims are potentially terrorists. While the *Maute*-related violence is senselessly condemnable and is far from being a revolutionary one, its characterization as a Muslim project of building a Caliphate in the region is equally condemnable.

Maute violence, as narrated by the University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies professor Darwin Absari, was triggered by a *Rido* or family rivalry common among Muslims in Mindanao resulting from the former's loss in a bidding over one project (ABS-CBN News 2017). Such a despicable undertaking was never waged, at least initially, under a religious cause. It was only later that *Maute* violence was suspiciously aligned to ISIS by local and Western media fed by information monopolized by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The non-essential relation between religion and the *Moro* struggle is also mentioned by Özerdem and Podder. They have strikingly showed that poverty rather than religion is the primary reason for involvement of many youth in the MILF (Özerdem and Podder 2012, 532). They revealed that the depressed economic conditions of the Provinces of Lanao, Cotabato, and Maguindanao, rather than a supposed Islamic or religious cause, primarily pushed youth *Moros* to join the resistance movement of the MILF. Hence, we can hardly attribute to the MILF, while even assuming an Islamic character in contrast to the MNLF's more nationalist and secular orientation, as being founded on religious grounds as it is more rooted on socio-economic maladies. The researchers reiterated that "poor governance delivery and related socio-political failures and incapacity by the Government of the Philippines have historically acted as a primary underlying variable for support and hope with the *Moro* cause" (Özerdem and Podder 2012, 542). Even San Juan clarified the matter further when he

said that “[w]hile the antagonism between Muslims and Christians dates back to Spanish colonization... and US colonial domination..., the present conflict is not religious, as usually construed, but fundamentally political and economic in terms of the division of social labor and its satisfaction of developing human needs” (San Juan 2006, 398).

The MNLF was also founded based on the principle of combating injustice and oppression. In Nur Misuari’s biography, he “hinted that no other factors apart from the injustices and oppression perpetrated by the erstwhile colonial powers and the current Manila government that made him think” (Macasalong 2014, 4) of establishing the MNLF. This view is somewhat confirmed when Hashim Salamat, the founding leader of the MILF, viewed the *Bangsamoro* struggle as rooted in territorial politics (Liow 2006, 14). This view is furthermore established when current demographics of *Moro* regions negate the dominance of Muslims thus prompting recalibration of the struggle’s content and the adoption of an inclusivist strategy that regards non-Muslims as members of the *Bangsamoro* (18). The non-Islamic nature of the *Moro* struggle is likewise stressed by Bauzon (2008, 78;) and Quimpo (2016, 14).

Second, we need to explain a rectified orientation of the current *Moro* movement, i.e. a political project battling neoliberal aggression. As Liow (2006, 8) correctly stressed, “the term *Moro* is defined more by resistance to external powers than by Islam or, for that matter, ethnicity”.

Moro resistance, while characteristically fragmented, is singularly a resistance against foreign and neocolonial intrusions. Since then, the *Moro* peoples have been battling a single and united enemy: Spanish colonialism in the 16th up to the late 19th century, American colonialism in the late 19th up to the middle of the 20th century, and American neocolonialism in the middle of the 20th century up to the present.

History professor Jamail Kamlian narrated how the US imperialists succeeded in securing economic power especially in the *Bangsamoro* region. He discussed how the neocolonial government protected foreign economic interests and allowed retention of multinational corporations’ monopoly of the *Bangsamoro* economy specifically in plantations wielding large exports in pineapple, banana, and rubber (Kamlian 2012).

Even mining industries are monopolized by foreign transnational companies and their local comprador cohorts in Mindanao (Panalipdan Minadanao, et al. 2014, 49-51) dispossessing native *Moros* and other national minorities of their ancestral lands. In the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) for example, a phenomenal growth in investments was recorded in the year 2014 (ARMM 2014) which included investments in the Languyan Mining Corporation in Tawi-Tawi. But the said region ironically was listed as the poorest across the archipelago (Ronda 2016). In fact, four of the five poorest regions in the Philippines are found in Mindanao (Public-Private Partnership Center 2017). This fact is in blunt contrast with the government data that “total mining investments

of US\$ 7.54 billion from 2006-2014 have already generated US\$ 19.1 billion in gross production value of metallic minerals over the same period (Panalipdan Mindanao, et al. 2014, 5)". Hence, while the environment suffered unspeakable destructive consequences out from these mining companies, prompting the Regional Legislative Assembly of the ARMM to ask the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to issue a cease-and-desist order on all mining companies operating in the region (The Manila Times 2016), these industries however raked enormous profit by exploiting cheap labor pegged at Php 230-300 (US\$ 450-5.87) (Panalipdan Mindanao, et al. 2015, 6). Neoliberal policies of repatriation of profits, tax exemptions, and labor flexibilization allow transnational companies gigantic amount of profits at the expense of local natural and human resources.

The flourishing of these transnational companies is conditioned on a strong support from the state, especially its armed forces. Since 2014, more than 60% of the regular AFP troops have been positioned in Mindanao to secure vast plantations and mining sites owned by transnational companies. This was initiated despite of what was then signed as the Comprehensive Agreement on the *Bangsamoro* (CAB) between the central government and the MILF (Panalipdan Mindanao, et al. 162). Said militaristic maneuvers are even reinforced by deployment of US forces in the island. Data show that the US has more forces in Mindanao than in Iraq (Alcober 2014). It has to be remembered that several *Moro* provinces and cities have already registered opposition to US military presence in Mindanao. Marawi City for example made a Resolution voicing opposition to the Military Exercises of the US Forces (Simbulan 2009, 100). Today, Marawi is a devastated City resulting from months-long of aerial bombings technically assisted by US troops (Mangosing 2017). Several Municipal Councils have likewise raised their opposition to the continued US military presence and exercises in Mindanao (Ibid.). The US' lingering presence has done more harm than good as the its presence has destroyed *Moro* communities even through Islamophobia (Lopez, 2017).

After months of a destructive War on Terror led by the US, the ADB (Asian Development Bank) and the IMF have expressed their intent to lead the rehabilitation of the devastated City of Marawi (de Vera 2017). USAID (United States Agency for International Development) for example "donated" Php 730 million dollars for the rehabilitation (Viray 2017). Such gesture however is already suspect of intentions geared towards the expansion of neoliberalism's hold in this Islamic City. This probably would resemble Bremer's message to the Iraqi people. Indeed, USAID's neoliberal core could not be denied. It's notion of development is one which serves the profiteering interests of Western business interests (Dixon 2011, 314). Dixon explained that USAID's program for health deploys "expert-led capacity-building workshops, rather than essential life-saving supplies. The education programmes focus on primary educational and vocational

training to create a pool of semi-skilled workers in the region for the 'global market.' Economic growth equates with an export-oriented economy..." (Dixon 2011, 314)

4. Conclusion: Towards a Moro Resistance to Neoliberalism

I conclude this paper by elucidating certain points which concern two fronts: the peace process and the *Moro* social movement. First, Iribarnegaray's & Jenkins' position for a dialogic resolution of conflicts is commendable. However, we need to clarify that such a dialogue must not be characterized as a Muslim-Western dialogic paradigm (Iribarnegaray and Jenkins 2016, 538). As a matter of fact, even the West are victims of neoliberal policies. In the Philippines, this dialogue must likewise avoid the erroneous Muslim-central government model. Since it has been correctly pointed out that neoliberalism is centrally behind the discontent and resistance of the *Moros*, then dialogue must be reconfigured according to the *radix* of neoliberalism's attack: socio-economic injustices. Hence, a dialogic peace process between the *Moro* people and the central government must primarily take into account how centuries of socio-economic injustices be properly addressed and eradicated. The supposed peace process must include in the negotiations land reform, national industrialization, free irrigation, improvement of workers' economic benefits, environmental protection and compensation, among others.

Second, since socio-economic reforms primarily concern the *Moros* in the grassroots level, then a strong *Moro* mass movement has to be organized on this basis. This will serve two ends. On the one hand, it will encourage participatory involvement of the least represented of the *Moros* in the peace building efforts. Through the movement, various local concerns can be properly raised, articulated, and amplified. In this regard, Iribarnegaray's & Jenkins' (2016, 542) position for a "local turn" is likewise insufficient for it will fail to create an organized constituency representative of the local sentiments. The thrust therefore is not to get local but to get organized as the principal enemy, neoliberalism, is highly organized. The said movement, in relation to the peace process, will substantially provide the items to be considered as agenda in the peace process.

On the other hand, the movement will independently exist as the united expression of *Moro* resistance against neoliberalism. It has to articulate clear ideological, political, and organizational principles which will serve as basis of unity for the *Moro* people. Being principally determined by grassroots politics, it must consistently banner the democratic aspirations of the *Moros*, even if *Moro* leaders in the negotiating panel seem to surrender the *Moro* cause in favor of watered-down compromises. In this regard, the movement will act as the supreme

representative of the Moro cause and serve as the efficient cause of whatever peace negotiations the Moro people will enter into in the future.

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