

Third, is the flexibility of the term ethnicity, which can include "community", "culture", language group, corporation, association or population, wherein their cultural traits distinguish them from the other groups.<sup>36</sup>

According to US political scientist Paul Brass, "community" refers to "ethnic groups whose members have developed an awareness of a common identity and have attempted to define the boundaries of the group."<sup>37</sup> A critical aspect in this regard is the "transformation or transition of a community into a nationality or a nation" when the community "mobilizes for political action and becomes politically significant... makes political demands and achieves a significant measure of success by its own efforts."<sup>38</sup>

In this regard, there are two options for the potential independence movement: national liberation in colonial settings and separatism in post-imperial and post-colonial situations.

De Silva adds that ethnicity is often used to serve political ends in a separatist movement. The danger lies in a situation wherein an ethnic group determined to secede becomes the majority, while a new ethnic minority also seeks to become a new majority. Thus, self-determination based on ethnic identities is a limited right in a political sense. In general, self-determination that is "limited to regional or local autonomy based on cultural distinctions, freedom of religion, language and association gains greater acceptance", albeit reluctantly and only after violent encounters.<sup>39</sup>

Although the above discussion does describe significant aspects of the Mindanao secessionist phenomenon, it is best to consider the historical and contemporary aspects of the Muslim struggle in order to gain a better perspective of this political issue.

Comprising approximately 15 % of the national population and about 25 % of the Mindanao population in the 1980s,<sup>40</sup> the Muslims or Moros in the Philippines strive for autonomy or independence. Presently, the approximately 3 million Muslims make up about 5 % of the national population. However, Misuari claims that there are 15 million indigenous Bangsamoro people in

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> In a 1980 national census, the non-Christians in Mindanao are composed of the Muslims numbered 2,504,232 out of the Mindanao population of 10,905,243 or about 23 % and the *Lumadnons* 1,269,660 or 12 %. Cited in Samuel K. Tan, "The Socio-economic Dimension of the Moro Secessionism", *Mindanao Studies Reports 1995/No. 1*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Integrative and Development Studies and UP Press, 1995, p. 1.