

THE UNBROKEN PATH: *IMAMANISM* AND HISTORICAL CONTINUITY IN BANGSAMORO POLITICAL THOUGHT

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Political Science at the Faculty
of Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts in Political Science



by:

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examined *Imamanism* as an indigenous conceptual framework for political struggle by the Moro People. Qualitative methods were employed in this study including, using semi-structured interviews of fifteen key informants—specifically senior leaders and commanders—from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), collecting oral history, and conducting a documentary analysis. It argues that dominant analytical frameworks in Bangsamoro scholarship, namely minority rights, autonomy, insurgency, and liberal peacebuilding, are insufficient for capturing the ideological dimensions of the Moro experience. *Imamanism* is operationalized through six interrelated features: sovereignty (unconquered), political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation, and legitimacy-based authority, derived from the Magindanaon and Buayan'n term "*Imaman*", or collective political awakening. The results show that, across the two main organizations, Moro people broadly frame their struggle not as a demand for inclusion into the Philippine state. Rather, they frame it as the assertion and continuation of a pre-colonial political and civilizational order interrupted by Spanish, American, and Philippine colonial rule, but never fully extinguished. *Imamanism*, then, is both a critique of historical domination and a living political vocabulary through which Moro people interpret authority, governance, and legitimacy on their own terms. This study contributes to postcolonial and decolonial theory, comparative political thought, and Bangsamoro studies by showing that the Moro struggle is best understood not as rebellion or separatism but as the continuous reclamation of historically legitimate sovereignty rooted in Islamic governance, civilizational memory, and indigenous conceptions of political authority.

Keywords: Bangsamoro, Moro political thought, Imamanism, sovereignty, historical continuity, Islamic governance, self-determination

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I dedicate this thesis to **my people**, the Bangsamoro. Many of them died fighting for our homeland. They fought against colonizers and those who followed them. Their sacrifice is the foundation of this work. Their struggle for self-determination is why this work was written.

To the **orphans** of forgotten revolutions, the mothers who buried sons before peace, and the youth who still dare to dream beneath broken ceilings—This is for you. Always remember what Imam Ali (as) said *“Your remedy is within you, but you do not sense it. Your sickness is from you, but you do not perceive it. You presume you are a small entity, but within you is enfolded the entire universe.”* May your memory outlive your silence.

Finally, I thank my **family**. They supported me at every step of this journey. This achievement belongs to them as much as it belongs to me.

Allāhumma ṣalli ‘alā Muḥammad wa āli Muḥammad.

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ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY

ARMM	: <i>Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</i>
BARMM	: <i>Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</i>
BTA	: <i>Bangsamoro Transition Authority</i>
MILF	: <i>Moro Islamic Liberation front</i>
MNLF-MF	: <i>Moro National Liberation Front—Misuari Faction</i>
MNLF-SF	: <i>Moro National Liberation Front—Sema Faction</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

For more than four centuries, the people of Mindanao especially the Moro people have successfully defended their indigenous political orders against the successive waves of colonial power from Spanish conquistador, American imperialism to Japanism colonialism. Yet despite the enduring and unresolved nature of this struggle, their political thought and the frameworks through which they understand authority, legitimacy, and self-determination has rarely been examined on its own terms.

The Bangsamoro¹ struggle has been studied intensively in the disciplines of Philippine studies and Southeast Asia studies. Existing literature on the Bangsamoro has produced a substantial body of knowledge on Moro society and its experiences with colonialism, armed struggle, and peace negotiations. A first category of historical literature (Majul, 1973; McKenna, 2023; Saleeby, 1905; Warren, 2007) has established precolonial polities with diplomatic relations with regional powers prior to Western colonization and patterns of resistance.

Racman (2022) underlines that the Lanao confederation under the Sultanate of Magindanao was a functioning political system even before the creation of the Republic of the Philippines in 1946. Bara and Abdulrahman (2025) argue that the Tausug possessed indigenous political philosophy connecting land, nation, and religion to form a coherent doctrine of governance and sovereignty. As Chanco (2017) argues that mainstream Philippine historiography tends to obscure the existence of competing indigenous sovereignties in Mindanao by framing the region exclusively within the territorial imagination of the Philippine nation-state.

¹ Bangsamoro refers to the collective political identity of historically distinct Moro polities: the Sultanate of Sulu (Tausūg), Sultanate of Magindanaw (Magindanon), and Rajahnate of Buayan (Buayan'n). While these communities had separate identities, Bangsamoro emerged as a unifying political identity in the mid-20th century, articulated by Prof. Nur Misuari in the MNLF and later developed by Dr. Salamat Hashim to frame the Moro struggle for self-determination and sovereignty.

A second category of literature deals with the Bangsamoro experience through the lenses of conflict resolution and security studies (Bertrand, 2000; Kreuzer, 2005; F. J. Lara & Champain, 2009; Abhoud Syed M Lingga, 2007). Söderberg Kovacs, Höglund, and Jiménez (2021) examine the Bangsamoro peace process after 2014 agreement and argue that while large-scale violence was reduced, unresolved historical grievance and political tensions remain. Yusoph and Odoy (2023) similarly emphasize the deep roots of colonial marginalization in shaping the Moro struggle. particularly in the context of conflict and settlements like armed conflict, insurgencies, and negotiated settlements.

While peace and security studies provide useful policy-oriented insights, they tend to view the situation from a state-centric perspective that assumes the legitimacy of the existing political order. This leads to the fact that Moro political claims are often interpreted as demands based on exclusion or underdevelopment, rather than on historical authority and political continuity. Critical peace scholars like Mac Ginty (2014) and Richmond (2009) have warned that such approaches risk turning political struggles into technical governance issues, thereby masking their ideological dimensions.

I argue that across both literatures, there is limited engagement with Moro political thought as a coherent ideological framework within the historical and peace-security literatures. Few studies explicitly address Moro conceptualisation of sovereignty, legitimacy, political identity and historical continuity. Instead, the dominant analytical frameworks remain: minority rights, autonomy, insurgency, and nationalism. I also argue that these concepts, which are rooted in Western political thought and experience of modern state-building, bring an assumption that may not align the historical and political realities of the Bangsamoro context.

Scholars of postcolonial theory like Said (1978) and Fanon, Sartre, and Farrington (1963) warn that uncritical reliance on externally derived frameworks can serve to marginalize alternative political worldviews. In the case of the Bangsamoro, the application of Western theoretical frameworks tends to take the finality of colonial borders for granted and to portray political struggle as a project of inclusion within a state that's already existing. Conceptual overstretching, according to Sartori (1970), occurs when concepts are used beyond their

appropriate contexts, thereby diminishing rather than increasing analytical precision.

Thus, I contend that analytical frameworks based on Moro political consciousness, indigenous traditions of legitimacy and historically rooted notions of sovereignty, rather than a reliance on externally derived theoretical paradigms, will provide a more historically and contextually grounded understanding of the Bangsamoro struggle.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the extensive literature on the Bangsamoro struggle, a main problem remains insufficiently addressed: the lack of a conceptual framework that captures how Moro themselves understand the meaning and purpose of their political struggle. Existing literature details historical developments, institutional arrangements, and negotiation processes. However, it rarely engages with the political thought underpinning Moro claims to authority, continuity, and legitimacy.

I contend that the dominant analytical frameworks used in Bangsamoro studies, particularly those centred on insurgency studies, autonomy arrangements, conflict resolution, and liberal peacebuilding (Abinales, 2010; Caballero-Anthony, 2016; F. Lara & Schoofs, 2016), tend to reduce Moro political struggle to rebellion, insurgency, or demands for autonomy within the Philippine state. Such interpretations obscure the ways in which Moro articulate their struggle as rooted in pre-colonial political orders², Islamic governance, and a historical consciousness of being unconquered. Therefore, I argue that the ideological dimension of the struggle remains under-theorized, and Moro leaders are often portrayed as strategic actors rather than as political thinkers.

This research identifies a theoretical gap from the limitations of prevailing concepts such as minority groups, autonomy, and liberal peacebuilding. According to Wirth (1945) minority groups are groups of people who experience unequal treatment and discrimination because of their cultural, ethnic, religious, or physical differences within society. Autonomy on the other hand by Lapidoth and Lapidoth (1997) highlight that a system that gives a group or region the right to govern some

² Sultanate of Sulu, Magindanao and Rajahnate of Buayan

of its own affairs while still remaining part of a larger state. Liberal Peacebuilding as what Richmond (2005) emphasize is that the process of building peace through democracy, governance reforms, human rights, and economic development after conflict. These concepts, while analytically useful in other contexts, inadequately explain political claims that are framed in terms of historical legitimacy and reclamation rather than inclusion or reform. The continued reliance on these concepts' risks misrepresenting the nature of the Bangsamoro struggle and reproducing conceptual assumptions that are misaligned with local political understandings.

In response to this gap, the research proposes *Imamanism* as an analytical concept to examine the Moro struggle as an ideological continuation of an interrupted political order. Rather than treating the struggle as an effort to create a new political arrangement or to integrate into an existing one, *Imamanism*³ conceptualizes it as an assertion of historical legitimacy grounded in (unconquered) sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation and legitimacy-based authority.

1.3 Operational Definition of *Imamanism*

For the purposes of this research, *Imamanism* refers to both Magindanaon and Buayan'n term "*Imaman*" which denotes the process of collective Moro political awakening and is operationalized as an ideological orientation expressed in the narratives of Moro through six interrelated features: (1) the perception of "*unconquered sovereignty*", articulated through claims that Moro political authority was never fully extinguished (Bara & Abdulrahman, 2025; Tan, 1993); (2) "*political identity*", reflected in the construction of Bangsamoro as a distinct and continuous collective subject (McKenna, 2023); (3) "*Islamic polity*", evident in references to Islam as a source of political order, moral authority, and governance (Abinales, 2010); (4) "*historical continuity*", demonstrated by linking contemporary struggles to pre-colonial Sultanates, Rajahnate and resistance traditions (Majul, 1973); (5) "*self-determination as reclamation*", framing political

³ *Imamanism* refers to an ideological orientation within the Moro struggle that emphasizes the revival of pre-colonial sovereignty, historical continuity, and indigenous-Islamic political authority as the basis for contemporary claims to self-determination and independence

struggle as the recovery of an existing right rather than a demand for new recognition (Tan, 1993); and (6) “*legitimacy-based authority*”, grounded in lineage, religious knowledge, historical leadership, or community consent rather than solely in state-derived legality (Racman, 2022).

These features serve as analytical indices that guide the thematic analysis and enable the researcher to systematically and consistently identify and interpret expressions of *Imamanism* across interviews and texts. This framework seeks to provide a more context-sensitive and conceptually accurate understanding of Bangsamoro political thought by emphasising how Moros interpret their own struggle through their political vocabulary.

1.4 Research Questions

This study has two (2) research questions. These include:

1. What are the factors that have led the Moro to articulate their political struggle in the paradigm of *Imamanism*?
2. How do the Moro claim their sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination and legitimacy-based authority within the discourse and framework of *Imamanism*?

1.5 Research Objectives

This research aimed to analyse the *Imamanism* as an ideological paradigm through which the Moro understand their historical experience and continuous political struggle, and to treat it as a contextually rooted political and moral vocabulary rather than as a rigid doctrine or normative political philosophy. In particular, it aimed to:

1. Explain the factors that have led the Moro to conceptualize their political struggle in the framework of *Imamanism*.
2. Analyze how the Moro articulate *Imamanism*: (unconquered) sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation, and legitimacy-based authority, and how these features serve together as an internally coherent framework for interpreting authority, governance, and political legitimacy.

The purpose of this research was not to defend *Imamanism* as a doctrinal truth, but to understand it as a political and moral vocabulary through which Moro people interpret their historical experience and political condition. This is a study of *Imamanism* as a living discourse, situated in the context of history, belief and government, not an ideology that is static or monolithic.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research has three important dimensions: theoretical, empirical and practical.

Theoretically, it contributes to the field of political and international relations by advancing *Imamanism* as an indigenous ideological framework. This study advances postcolonial and decolonial discourses by incorporating the endurance, rather than merely the resistance, of precolonial legitimate governance traditions, and by understanding the Bangsamoro struggle as a reclaiming of an unbroken political and civilizational continuity.

Empirically, the study gives voice to Moro as active theorists and interpreters of their own political realities. These are viewed as critical sources of knowledge. It therefore addresses the gap that exists in scholarship where indigenous perspectives are marginalized or categorized within the external academic framework. This approach offers a better understanding how Moro people understand sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, and self-determination as reclamation and legitimacy-based authority.

Practically, the research offers understandings related to peacebuilding, governance, and policy formulation in Mindanao. Understanding Bangsamoro struggle using the concept of *Imamanism* helps policy makers and scholars to undertake reconciliation in terms of autonomy by recognizing their historical consciousness and political legitimacy. It also supports and helps a just and culturally grounded form of self-governance in the Bangsamoro region.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research was appropriate for the study, which concerned political meanings, ideological narratives, and interpretive frameworks, and for the kind of knowledge that cannot be reduced to numbers or measured across large populations. The aim was depth of understanding, not statistical generalization.

The study used two approaches combined: a field-based interview examining how Moro leaders understand and articulate their struggle through their own political vocabulary and a document-historical analysis of primary and secondary sources tracing the Bangsamoro political tradition across historical periods.

1.7.2 Data Collection

Data collection was threefold such as oral interviews, oral histories and documentary analysis.

Fifteen key informants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. These key informants are five from MILF and ten from MNLF (five from the Sema faction and five from the Misuari faction). Informants were deliberately selected for their direct involvement in organizational leadership, ideology formulation and political decision-making within the Bangsamoro liberation movements. Interviews were conducted in Filipino, English and Magindanaon, according to the preference of the informants.

Oral histories were collected from selected informants with direct memory of the founding period of the liberation movements, recovering knowledge of how Bangsamoro political ideas were transmitted across generations.

The documentary analysis included official peace agreements, historical accounts and secondary scholarly literature, which provided both historical context and a triangulating resource for the interview data.

Table 1.1 Key Informants by Organization

Organization / Faction	Informants	Access Facilitated by
MILF	5	Brigade Commander Datu Saudi Kasan, 118th Base Command
MNLF—Sema Faction	5	Dr. Abdulmanan S. Manalasal, Vice Chairman, MNLF Central Maguindanao Revolutionary Committee
MNLF—Misuari Faction	5	Sheikh Datu Mohamad Parid Solaiman Adas
TOTAL	15	

1.7.3 Data Analysis

The interview and oral history data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Interview transcripts were iteratively coded to examine how these features were articulated, emphasized, or contested across organizational and historical contexts. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring meanings and ideological patterns. Also, triangulation was performed from documentary sources. This approach guaranteed that the lived experiences of Moro leaders in the struggle were analyzed as a set of shared meanings and as a discourse produced within the matrix of power relations and historical conditions.

1.7.4 Research Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Higher Ethics Committee of Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII). All informants were informed and consented to each interview. All data were stored securely; confidentiality was maintained, as requested. During fieldwork, strict adherence to cultural protocols was observed such as the use of proper honorifics and traditional titles, following Islamic ethical norms, and observing the Bangsamoro hospitality traditions.

1.8 Research Positionality

1.8.1 The Problem of My Position

I cannot study the Bangsamoro struggle from an outside perspective. I cannot pretend otherwise. The truth is that I am a part of the Bangsamoro who are

the subject of this research. My belongingness has affected everything: the questions I have posed, the access that was provided to me, my interpretation, and the significance of the findings. This is not a confession to be made and left behind. Instead, a condition that informs the epistemological premises of the whole study. It is not a formulaic disclaimer, but a sustained, honest self-examination.

My positionality is complex. It consists of at least three partly overlapping and sometimes competing orientations. First, I am personally related to many of those people whom I interviewed because we lived in the same region and politically shared background. A kind of connections that gave me a certain quality of access and a certain degree of communicative trust that no outside researcher could reasonably expect to replicate. Second, I have been trained academically in Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII), in a graduate program of critical social science, a discipline whose methodological conventions were largely developed outside the Bangsamoro context and whose instinct is toward systematic scepticism. Third, and most significantly, I have a direct intellectual stake in *Imamanism* itself, as its originator. I raise this last point not in the spirit of transparency but because it has real methodological significance. A reader has a right to know that the analyst and the architect of the framework are one and the same, and to bear that in mind when evaluating the interpretations that follow.

This is exactly the problem that Hale (2008) highlights with regard to what he terms "*the romance of the organic intellectual*," that being close to a community generates a false belief in epistemic privilege where identity alone is considered to grant epistemological certainty. I take the warning in good faith. As a Bangsamoro, I have knowledge of linguistic, historiographic and political discourse that an outside observer might misinterpret or even fail to recognize. This does not mean that I am free of the biases due to my commitment. The evidentiary case for *Imamanism* has to be rigorously built from the data. It needs to be open to findings that complicate or contradict the framework including findings that this study may not have been designed to surface.

Even the category of being "*insider*" is questionable rather than something to be accepted uncritically. My informants were not only fellow Bangsamoro but they are senior commanders, vice-chairpersons, and religious scholars. The

authority, leadership roles, and long political experience positioned them in a very different place from mine as a graduate researcher. This difference in power and seniority might influenced what they chose to share. Also, how they presented their views, and what they decided not to discuss. Further, these organizations in this study have long histories of rivalry and competing claims over who best represents the Bangsamoro political tradition. My relations to one or the other faction may have affected the dynamics of trust which I cannot now fully resolved. My effort to maintain equal numbers of participants across groups, systematic triangulation against documentary and historical sources reduces but does not eliminate the problem. However, I need to acknowledge the limitation rather than hide it.

The study has important limitations that should be acknowledged here. The fifteen participants are all seniors, male and exclusively from two liberation movements. The views of traditional politicians, women leaders, youth activists, religious scholars outside the movements, and Bangsamoro who sought accommodation or disengagement from armed struggle are entirely missing. A study constructed from those voices could not only add to, but significantly reconsider, the account of Bangsamoro political thought that *Imamanism* provides. I do not treat this as a shortcoming to be minimized; I treat it as a constitutive limit which the reader must hold in view in assessing the framework's claims.

What I am describing is close to what Anzaldúa (2025) theorizes as the borderlands: not a resolved synthesis of competing positions but a space in which contradictions are lived and not transcended. I occupy simultaneously the position of the committed Bangsamoro scholar and the position of the trained critical analyst, and I have not attempted to resolve that tension by privileging one over the other. The integrity of this thesis depends on whether this tension produces a more rigorous and searching analysis than either position could achieve on its own. That is not a statement I am able to make here in this section. It is something that the following analytical chapters need to demonstrate.

1.9 Scope and Delimitation

The study focused on the MILF and MNLF as the two principal defenders of the Bangsamoro political tradition in the modern era. It did not represent the wider array of political actors in the BARMM or the broader Bangsamoro civil

society. Organizational protocols, security conditions and access to informants affected the number of participants. This was counterbalanced by a focus on depth rather than breadth and triangulation of interview data with documentary and historical sources.

The qualitative methodology employed-thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and oral histories, supplemented by documentary analysis—is suited to investigating political meaning and ideological structure, but does not yield statistical generalizability. The findings are analytically generalizable to the theory of *Imamanism* rather than representative of all Moro political actors.

1.10 Organization of the Study

The thesis is structured in five chapters. Chapter I outline the research design and background. Chapter II provides a literature review and a theoretical basis of the study. *Imamanism* is presented as an analytical framework. Chapter III provides a historical and contextual account of the Bangsamoro, including the etymology of the term “*Moro*,” the demographic and cultural profile of the Bangsamoro people, and the trajectory of the Moro struggle from the pre-colonial period to the BARMM. Chapter IV discussed the thematic findings of the study. The chapter discussed the articulation of the six dimensions of *Imamanism* in the MILF and MNLF. Chapter V is the conclusion which discusses the contributions of the study to Bangsamoro studies and comparative political theory, and indicates directions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter reviews the existing literature on the Bangsamoro struggle to identify the gap this study seeks to address and to establish the theoretical foundation for the concept of *Imamanism*. It does not aim to present a comprehensive examination of all studies on the Moro; instead, it identifies the dominant scholarly paradigms, analyses their strengths and weaknesses, and explains the need for a new ideological framework to understand the Moro struggle on its own terms.

2.1 Review of Literature

Existing literature on the Bangsamoro struggle can be divided into three major categories: (1) historical studies; (2) peace and security studies; and (3) literature on Islamic and non-Western political thought. Each category reveals important elements of the Moro experience, but each also has serious analytical limitations. This literature shares a common theoretical gap: none of them adequately address the ideological dimension of the Moro struggle, that is, how Moros themselves understand, narrate, and legitimate their political project. This gap serves as the basis for this study and the development of *Imamanism* as an analytical framework.

2.1.1 Historical Studies and Their Limitations

Historical literature is the most extensive category of scholarship on Moro society. Basically, the main source of knowledge about Moro society, political institutions, and resistance. This body of work shows that the Moro have a civilizational historical account that predates both Spanish and American colonial rule.

One important works in this area is Cesar Adib Majul's *Muslims in the Philippines*, an influential political history of Islam and Sultanate in Mindanao and Sulu. Majul (1973) explains the political institutions, legal customs, and diplomatic relations of the Sultanates of Sulu and Magindanao, and describing that these political orders had diplomatic relations with regional powers like Brunei, Borneo,

and China long before the European colonization of the Philippines. His main argument is that the Moro were never passive objects but active subjects within a regional Islamic political order. This study which provides historical legitimacy for Moro sovereignty, which *Imamanism* theorises as unbroken.

Additionally, an earlier ethnography and analysis of the customary law and Islamic jurisprudence prevailing in the Sultanates was studied by Saleeby (1905). Saleeby (1905) highlights how the legal system of Moros was grounded in morality and religion through his demonstration that political power was not arbitrary in the Moros Sultanates. This is one of the key elements of what is termed legitimacy-based authority in *Imamanism*.

A sophisticated account of the Sulu Sultanate as a dynamic maritime political economy is found in Warren (2007) where it challenges colonial representations of the Moro as pirates and raiders. Warren (2007) proves that Sulu was a functional sovereign state integrated into Southeast Asian trade network.

Another important work is Thomas McKenna and it was published on 1998 and updated on 2023; His work provides a sophisticated ethnographic account of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the social foundations of Moro political identity. McKenna (2023) discusses the interplay of religion and politics within the Moro leadership and the deliberate marginalization of Moro communities through American colonial land policy and the undermining of indigenous governance. His analysis is central to the understanding of how the historical dispossession is fuelling the contemporary Moro political imagination.

The colonial period is seen from different perspectives by Abinales (2000) and Ileteo (1998). Abinales (2000) argues that American colonial state-building produced structural inequalities between the Christian settlers and Muslim communities in Mindanao. Similarly, Ileteo (1998) emphasizes that political consciousness is constructed outside elite-centered narratives. These are both useful works for situating the Moro struggle within the longer colonial history of the Philippine archipelago.

Looking at historical studies, all share a common limitation: they tend to be largely descriptive of events, institutions and social structures. They do not systematically investigate how political ideas, such as sovereignty, legitimacy, the

right to self-determination, etc., are transmitted across generations or articulated as ideology. The Moro Resistance is portrayed as historical action, not ideological posture. Historical literature can describe the continuity of the Moro struggle but cannot explain its ideational coherence or its distinctive political vocabulary. Thus, historical scholarship is necessary, but not sufficient, for this study.

2.1.2 Peace and Security Research and State-Oriented Thinking

The second major category of literature is the Bangsamoro as an object of conflict resolution, peace negotiations and governance reform. This literature gained significant momentum as the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) progressed through a series of agreements culminating in the Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018) and the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Jacques Bertrand's *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Southeast Asia* provides a comparative analysis of ethnic conflicts in the region and considers the Moro struggle as an example of reactive ethnicity and nationalist mobilization against state-sponsored assimilation policies (Bertrand, 2000). Bertrand's framework is useful for explaining the causes of armed mobilization. However, it tends to reduce the Moro struggle to a reactive phenomenon rather than a proactive assertion of an independent political tradition.

In addition, Abhoud Syed M Lingga (2007) gives an insider view of the negotiating positions of the MNLF and MILF especially on the question of self-determination based on his work especially on Luwaran and various policy papers (2006, 2007). He also argues that the peace process has always failed to address the root cause of the conflict which is the non-recognition of Bangsamoro sovereignty, and that autonomy arrangements are fundamentally inadequate substitutes for genuine self-determination. His analysis is useful to this study in that it locates the ideological stakes behind the peace negotiations.

Furthermore, Francisco Lara and Phil Champaign's *Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao: Revisiting the Dynamics of Conflict and Exclusion* discusses the socioeconomic aspect of the conflict and argues that political exclusion and developmental marginalization are structural causes of the Moro insurgency (F. J.

Lara & Champain, 2009). Their analysis is empirically grounded and of policy relevance, but tends to portray the Moro struggle as a problem of inclusion in the Philippine state, rather than a claim to a different political order altogether.

Moreover, Peter Kreuzer's study of Philippine conflict and state failure applies a governance-oriented approach to study the MILF insurgency and to evaluate the prospects for peace in terms of institutional capacity and political will. Kreuzer's work is emblematic of the broader trend in peace and security studies to evaluate the Moro struggle based on the Philippine state's capacity to respond to minority claims, rather than to question the legitimacy of the state's sovereignty over Moro lands (Kreuzer, 2005).

Critical peace scholars provide important correctives to these tendencies. Liberal peacebuilding approaches systematically re-cast political struggles as technical issues of governance and management depoliticizing the claims of non-state actors (Mac Ginty 2014; Richmond 2009). Their critique exposes how peace and security literature frequently characterizes Moro leaders as negotiators in pursuit of inclusion rather than as political thinkers who articulate a distinct vision of sovereignty and self-governance in the context of Bangsamoro.

The central limitation of this body of literature, therefore, is its acceptance of the Philippine state as the final and legitimate political authority within which Moro claims must be resolved. By treating sovereignty as settled and self-determination as a matter of devolution rather than reclamation, peace and security studies foreclose the very questions that this research seeks to open: What is the Moro political vision? How do Moro understand the legitimacy of their struggle? What concept of sovereignty underlies their political thought?

2.1.3 Islamic and Non-Western Political Thought

A third, less frequently applied category of literature engages with Islamic governance, non-Western political thought, and postcolonial critiques of sovereignty and identity. Although these works have not been systematically applied to the Bangsamoro context, they provide the intellectual resources most relevant to understanding the ideological dimension of the Moro struggle.

Wael Hallaq's work titled *"The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament"* argues that the modern state is structurally hostile

to classical Islamic political theory. For Hallaq, the modern state turns the moral-legal authority of the Shari'ah into bureaucratic sovereignty, and turns governance from an ethical project to a device of power (Hallaq, 2012). This argument is directly related to the Bangsamoro case where the Moro political tradition views authority as derived from divine sanction and moral accountability and not territorial control or electoral legitimacy. Hallaq's critique offers some explanation as to why Moro political claims cannot be understood simply within a Western state theory.

In addition, Euben (1999) suggests that Islamic political thought must not be perceived as a response to either modernity or irrationalism but rather as a distinct and independent tradition of intellectual discourse. Euben's approach challenges the comparative politics approach to treating the political movements of Islam as a foil to liberal democracy (Euben, 1999). On this basis, the Moro political tradition may be considered as an autonomous ideological paradigm that needs to be analyzed in its own terms.

According to Asad (2003) the impact of modernity on the role of religion in politics has been analyzed. Asad (2003) presents an anthropological perspective that enables an understanding of how secular analysis failed to recognize the dynamics of the interplay between politics and religion in Moro.

Moreover, Chatterjee (2020) suggests that non-Western nationalist groups form their political identity in the cultural, religious and family spaces, which are called "*inner domain*". The "*inner domain*" becomes the political domain of sovereignty even within the context of colonial domination. The approach is highly relevant to the Bangsamoro, who managed to preserve a political legacy, formed within the "*inner domain*" of their culture.

Nevertheless, (Taylor, 1994) introduces the notion of recognition as a political claim. Identity is constructed through and depends on the recognition of historical and cultural distinctiveness. Taylor's framework is useful for understanding why Moro political claims are not reducible to demands for material redistribution or administrative autonomy, but rather a deeper claim to recognition as a political community with its own history, moral tradition, and legitimate authority.

This body of literature provides the intellectual framework for understanding the Moro struggle as an ideological phenomenon. However, with the partial exception of Lingga's policy-oriented work (2006-2007), none of these authors has applied their frameworks directly and systematically to the Bangsamoro case. This constitutes the most significant gap in the existing literature and the space into which this study intervenes.

2.1.4 The Ideological Gap: What the Literature Misses

In all three categories of literature reviewed above, there is a common and basic absence. No scholar has examined the Moro struggle as an ideology. No existing study systematically examines how Moro leaders and communities understand their own political struggle. What notions do they use? What values do they appeal to? What historical narratives do they invoke?

Furthermore, what sort of political order do they want? This is not a one-off gap. It is indicative of a structural limitation of the dominant modes of analysis.

Theoretical insights by Anderson (2020) on imagined communities and Mamdani (2020) on the colonality of political categories converge on a similar diagnosis: frameworks constructed from and for Western political experience tend to silence alternative political worldviews by making them invisible or unintelligible. In the case of the Bangsamoro, this means that the Moro struggle is always told through the language of the Philippine state as insurgency, rebellion, minority rights or autonomy rather than in its own terms.

This conceptual limitation leads to what Sartori (1970) calls conceptual overstretch: the use of concepts beyond their original contexts in ways that distort rather than illuminate the phenomena being studied. The use of terms such as *“rebellion,” “minority,” “separatism,”* and *“autonomy”* assumes the legitimacy of the Philippine state’s sovereignty over Moro territories. Applied to a society that has never accepted that sovereignty as legitimate, these concepts veil the political reality they imply to describe. They are unable to explain (unconquered) sovereignty, political identity based on Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation, or legitimacy-based authority and the very dimensions that constitute the Moro political tradition.

This study fills this gap by conceptualizing *Imamanism* as emerging from within the Moro political tradition rather than being imposed from outside. Instead of asking whether the Moro fit existing theoretical categories, this research asks which categories the Moro themselves use and what those categories reveal about a political tradition that has never been fully conquered.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This part establishes the theoretical framework. It starts with postcolonial and decolonial theory, which provides the critical basis for understanding the Bangsamoro struggle beyond Eurocentric paradigms. The study then looks at comparative sovereignty and indigenous political theory. These show how sovereignty can be viewed as something relational and morally historical, not just as recognized by states. Drawing from these theoretical bases, it introduces *Imamanism* as the conceptual framework of the study, one that synthesizes these theoretical resources and applies them to the specific historical and political context of the Bangsamoro.

2.2.1 Postcolonial and Decolonial Literary Theory

The first theoretical foundation of this work is postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. This provides a critical framework to understand the shaping of and distortion of the analysis of non-Western political struggles by colonial knowledge production.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) shows that Western scholarly and political representations of the Muslim world are not neutral descriptions, but ideologically charged constructions that served colonial power by portraying non-Western societies as irrational, backward and incapable of self-governance (Said, 1978). Said's critique applies directly to the study of the Bangsamoro, where colonial representations of the Moro as pirates, fanatics, and insurgents (Gowing, 1989) have shaped the analytical categories of subsequent scholarship. Serious study of the Moro struggle is in part a dismantling of these inherited representations.

Also, Fanon (1961) shows how colonization degrades a colonized people's ability to govern themselves and think politically. It shows this happens through psychological manipulation rather than just physical force. The study's argument

that understanding the Moro struggle requires recovering the Moro's own political vocabulary is founded upon Fanon's insight that decolonisation is not merely a political but an epistemic project, and a project of recovering suppressed forms of knowledge and subjectivity.

Furthermore, W. Mignolo (2011) and Quijano (2000) theory of the coloniality of power extend this critique by showing that colonial power persists after formal decolonization through epistemic hierarchies, and structures of knowledge production that privilege Western frameworks and marginalize indigenous and non-Western ways of knowing. Mignolo (2011) concept of "*epistemic disobedience*" which the refusal to accept colonial terms of analysis is particularly relevant for this study's methodological commitment to theorizing from within the Moro tradition.

Moreover, within international relations scholarship, Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) and Barkawi and Laffey (2006) have argue that mainstream International Relation theory systematically marginalizes Islamic and indigenous political traditions, producing a Eurocentric discipline that cannot completely explain the diversity of political forms in world history. However, Acharya (2014) call for a "*Global International Relations*" a pluralized understanding of international life that draws on multiple civilizational traditions that provides a constructive response to this critique and supports this study's desire to contribute to comparative political theory from the perspective of the Moro experience.

2.2.2 Sovereignty Studies and Indigenous Political Theory

The second theoretical foundation of this study draws on critical sovereignty studies and indigenous political theory, which question the assumption that the Westphalian model of state sovereignty is the only legitimate or historically inevitable form of political order. Connolly (1995) and Walker (1993) argue that the modern state's claim to exclusive territorial sovereignty is a political construct, not a natural or universal truth. The Bangsamoro case is an example of what Connolly (1995) and Walker (1993) refer to as a layered and relational form of sovereignty embedded in history, culture, and moral tradition that predates and exceeds the boundaries of the modern state. This point is further elaborated through Rodil (1994) concept of "*transitional sovereignty*" which explains how Moro governance

has adapted to changing political circumstances, without losing its original claim of historical legitimacy.

Islamic political philosophy provides a different, but complementary, account of sovereignty. Sovereignty (Hakimiyyah) is not viewed in the Islamic perspective as a human attribute to be distributed by constitutional law, but as a divine attribute whose exercise is delegated to rulers who are accountable to ethical and religious principles.. Esposito (1998) and Nasr (2009) have shown that this understanding of sovereignty, grounded in the Quranic concept of the human being as ‘Khalifah’ (vicegerent) on earth, leads to a unique conception of political authority as moral trusteeship rather than coercive power. This understanding is reflected in the Moro traditions of Adat and Sultanate governance analyzed by Majul (1973).

Tully (2008) and Simpson (2020) characterize indigenous sovereignty as a mode of political existence that operates both inside and outside the state, as a relational, networked, and land-based mode grounded in kinship, collective memory, and sacred law, rather than territorial control and international recognition. Their framework resonates with the Bangsamoro sense of sovereignty embedded in a living civilizational tradition, rather than formal statehood. This research builds on Escobar (2020) concept of “*pluriversal politics*”, where the simultaneous existence of multiple political rationalities without hierarchy might provide another theoretical resource for understanding the Moro claim to a distinct political order, not as an exception but as a legitimate manifestation of political plurality.

2.2.3 *Imamanism* as a Method of Analysis for the Study

Based on these theoretical bases, the research introduces *Imamanism* as the original analytical framework of the study. *Imamanism* is an ideology and political tradition that understands the Moro struggle is not seeking for inclusion within the Philippine state, or as a revolutionary project to create something new, but as the defence and reassertion of an existing political order, rooted in the pre-colonial sovereignty of the Bangsamoro Sultanates that was disrupted but never extinguished by colonial rule.

The idea of *Imamanism* separates from the existing postcolonial and nationalist frameworks in two important ways. Firstly, it does not position the Moro

as reactive subjects who struggle in response to colonial imposition; rather, it positions them as proactive political actors whose struggle is grounded in a positive ideological tradition with its own vocabulary, historical memory, and normative commitments. Secondly, it does not accept the terms of the Philippine state's sovereignty as the baseline against which Moro claims must be evaluated; rather, it treats Moro sovereignty as historically prior and philosophically independent.

Imamanism is systematized around six analytical dimensions, each of which corresponds to a core feature of the Moro political tradition and will serve as a coding category in this study's thematic analysis:

1. **(Unconquered) Sovereignty:** The claim that Moro political authority derives from inherited sovereignty and was never legitimately transferred to the Spanish, American, or Philippine state.
2. **Political Identity:** The understanding that Moro identity is constituted by a shared history, Islamic faith, customary law (adat), and political tradition that distinguishes the Bangsamoro as a distinct people.
3. **Islamic Polity:** The commitment to a form of governance grounded in Islamic ethical and legal principles, in which political authority is inseparable from moral and religious accountability.
4. **Historical Continuity:** The insistence that the Moro struggle today is not a new development but the modern expression of a centuries-old political tradition, linking contemporary Moro leaders to the Sultans, Rajah and Datus of the pre-colonial political orders.
5. **Self-Determination as Reclamation:** The understanding that the goal of the Moro struggle is not secession or separatism which would imply acceptance of the Philippine state's prior sovereignty but the reclamation of a sovereignty that was never surrendered.
6. **Legitimacy-Based Authority:** The idea that political authority within the Moro community is grounded not in electoral system or constitutional law but in moral authority, religious knowledge, historical lineage and communal recognition.

These six dimensions will be used in the subsequent chapters for the thematic analysis of interview data and through interpretation of documentary

sources. Both allow for the Moro struggle to be perceived as a coherent ideological project rather than as a series of reactive resistance episodes.

Imamanism has three contributions to comparative political theory and Bangsamoro studies. Firstly, it offers a context-sensitive analytical concept that is grounded in the Moro political tradition itself, honoring its epistemic integrity instead of imposing external frameworks. Secondly, it is part of the larger project of pluralizing political theory by showing that non-Western political traditions offer sophisticated and original concepts of sovereignty, authority and self-determination. Lastly, it is a useful basis for analysis in the interpretation of the political thought and organizational narratives of the MILF and MNLF, the two main defenders of the Moro political tradition in the contemporary period.

This study is based on *Imamanism* and moves from description to interpretation. It is not only about mapping what the Moro have done, but understanding what they believe, why they believe it, and how that belief is a live political ideology.

2.3 Key Conceptual Tensions: Legitimacy, Polity, Identity, Self-Determination, and History

The six analytical dimensions of *Imamanism*: Unconquered Sovereignty (Dala masakop a kadatu), Political Identity (P'gkilalan lon a kamal), Islamic Polity (Kamal a Islam), Historical Continuity (Nangimb't'lan a Katudtulan), Self-Determination as Reclamation (Kap'bp'd'l sa ginawa ndo kabuwat paluman), and Legitimacy-Based Authority (Kadatu a Tinalima no Madak'l). These are not self-evident categories. Each carries its own theoretical genealogy and contested prior meanings. In this section I engage those genealogies to show why dominant Western liberal-state framings of these concepts are insufficient for the Bangsamoro context, and how I reconstitute them through *Imamanism*.

Two cautions frame this engagement. First, I am not presenting Bangsamoro political thought and Western political theory as two hermetically sealed, internally pure traditions. I am arguing that specific assumptions embedded in dominant Western framings. The territorial sovereignty, state authority, and the basis of political legitimacy essentially cannot be applied to the Bangsamoro context without distorting it. The distinction is between analytical inadequacy and

civilizational opposition. Secondly, concepts have political interests. For example, the concepts by Weber, Krasner, Anderson, Koselleck, and Hobsbawm and Ranger emerged from particular institutional context where certain political communities were seen as the normal and others were not. Acknowledging this is a precondition for using them honestly. This is what Acharya (2014) calls concept localization: the process by which political ideas are translated, adapted, and reconstituted as they travel across different historical and cultural contexts. The goal is analytical precision, not epistemic nationalism.

2.3.1 Kadatu a Tinalima no Madak'l (Legitimacy-Based Authority)

Legitimacy can be most effectively understood as the three pure forms of legitimate authority identified by Weber (1978) in modern political theories: first, traditional, where the belief in tradition is inherent; second, charismatic, where one person is attributed with outstanding characteristics; and third, legal-rational, which is based upon obedience to rational processes of procedure. Liberal democratic theories have nearly equated legitimacy with the third form of legitimate authority (Beetham, 1991). This is analytically powerful for modern states, but problematic in application to political communities whose claims to authority predate and operate independently of state-defined legal frameworks. The Bangsamoro case is precisely one example.

The legitimacy of “*Kadatu a Tinalima*” for the Moro leaders interviewed for this study is not a result of constitutional recognition or electoral victory. It is based on moral responsibility to Allah SWT, loyalty to Islamic political principles such as Amanah (sacred trust) and Shura (consultation), continuity with pre-colonial political traditions and ongoing closeness to local populations. It cannot be reduced to any of the three types described by Weber (1978) but draws on all three perspectives. *Imamanism* provides a fourth type: civilizational legitimacy, which rests at once on historical inheritance, divine accountability, and communal recognition.

Suchman's (1995) broader sociological definition of legitimacy as the perception that an entity's actions are desirable and appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms is more accommodating of this alternative conception, but still does not capture its specifically Islamic and historically rooted dimensions.

Reading legitimacy “*Kadatu a Tinalima*” through *Imamanism* thus requires moving beyond both Weberian typology and liberal democratic theory.

2.3.2 Kamal (Polity)

Polity in Western political thought has evolved mainly through the paradigm of Westphalia's territorial sovereign state—a political entity with monopoly on legitimate use of violence within a defined territory, and recognized by other states in the international system (Krasner, 1999). The Westphalian approach considers the state to be the standard unit of political organization and evaluates all other political entities according to this standard.

As argued by Hallaq (2012), Westphalian state is not only an alternative paradigm to the traditional Islamic paradigm of political organization, but it is also entirely incompatible with the former. This is because neither the Sultanate nor the Rajahnate system of the Bangsamoro was the precursor of the nation-state; rather, they were political arrangements that worked on the basis of other organizing concepts, such as genealogy, Islamic jurisprudence, consultation, and networks of commerce, kinship, and diplomacy which do not follow fixed territorial boundaries.

Imamanism does not describe polity “*kamal*” as a bounded territorial unit but as a moral and civilizational order. It can persist, be interrupted, and be reclaimed across historical periods without the formal structures of statehood. This understanding is more akin to what Escobar (2020) calls pluriversal politics. The recognition that multiple political rationalities can coexist—than to the unitary state model that dominates mainstream political science.

2.3.3 P'gkilalan lon a kamal (Political Identity)

Political identity in liberal political theory is often seen as the product of social interaction, institutional recognition and collective narrative (Taylor, 1994). In Anderson (2020) influential account of nationalism, national identity is an imagined community, a product of print capitalism, shared temporality and the institutional practices of modern states. Anderson's (2020) framework is useful in understanding how Bangsamoro identity “*P'gkilalan lon*” was consolidated and named in the twentieth century. The adoption of the term “*Moro*” as a banner of resistance by MNLF, but it risks reducing identity “*Kamal*” to a modern political

invention, obscuring the pre-colonial political and civilizational foundations that *Imamanist* discourse argues existed before colonial rule. A more productive corrective is offered by Chatterjee (2020), who argues that non-Western nationalisms produce identity in a ‘inner domain’ of culture, religion and social life that was not completely penetrated by colonial power. For the Bangsamoro, this inner domain, meaning Islam, Adat, oral tradition, genealogical memory are sustained in a political identity "*P'gkilalan lon a kamal*" that was not produced by the modern state but preserved against it. *Imamanism* describes political identity as historically constituted rather than state-granted, civilizational continuous rather than institutionally constructed, and actively transmitted rather than passively inherited. This is a substantively different account of identity from both liberal recognition theory and modernist nationalism, and it requires its own analytical vocabulary.

2.3.4 Kap'bp'd'l sa ginawa (Self-determination)

Self-determination in international law and political theory has been theorized primarily in two registers: as a right of colonial peoples to independence from external domination (the Wilsonian and UN Charter tradition); and as a right of peoples within existing states to meaningful political participation and cultural autonomy—the internal self-determination tradition associated with (Buchanan, 2007; Cassese, 1995). Both registers share a common assumption: that self-determination is a right to be claimed from and recognized by a state or international body with the authority to grant it. This assumption is precisely what *Imamanist* discourse refuses.

The right of self-determination for the Moro leaders in this study is not a new right to be recognized but an existing right to be reclaimed. The right is not derived from the post-colonial international legal order but from the pre-colonial sovereignty of the Sultanates and Rajahnate. The above-mentioned approach of reclamation also has a philosophical basis. This can be understood from the theories developed by the indigenous political thinkers such as Tully (2008) and Simpson (2020). According to their theories, the political rights of indigenous people do not derive from state recognition but rather are part of pre-state political communities. The conflict between the notion of self-determination as defined in international

law and that within the *Imamanist* perspective is not simply semantic; it is also ideological in nature.

2.3.5 Nangimb't'lan a Katudtulan (Historical Continuity)

History itself is perhaps the most theoretically underexamined concept. The argument for *Imamanism* rests largely on the claim of historical continuity; that the Bangsamoro political tradition is a continuous if interrupted, line from the pre-colonial Sultanates and Rajahnate to the present. But what theory of history justifies the claim? History as seen by Koselleck (2004) as either an experience space, where the past is experienced and recollected, or as an expectation horizon, the future constructed through prior knowledge. The political community does not simply inherit history but creates it through selection of historical events, commemoration of certain figures and highlighting of certain continuities. *Imamanism*'s historical narrative—from Rajah Silongan of Buayan through the Moro Wars, the Jabidah Massacre, and the MNLF and MILF revolutions—is such a construction, not fabricated but assembled, emphasized, and transmitted through particular political and institutional processes.

Ranger and Hobsbawm (1983) caution that what appear to be ancient and continuous traditions are often relatively recent constructions, invented or significantly reinvented at particular historical moments for particular political purposes. This insight does not undermine the *Imamanist* claim of historical continuity, but it does require the researcher to distinguish between continuity as historical reality and continuity as political claim. The thesis argues that *Imamanism* makes this latter kind of claim, and that this is not a weakness but a strength. No matter which elements are chosen or highlighted, the narrative of Bangsamoro's continuing sovereignty is a historically valid and politically productive one. Indeed, a political community is brought into existence on the basis of its narratives about itself. This was the view of Fanon (1961), who recognized that decolonization was an attempt to recreate a pre-colonial past not only historically but also politically. History "*Katudtulan*", in *Imamanism*, is not merely background context. It is an active political resource, a living claim, and a moral argument. Describing it as such—rather than treating it as a transparent record of events—is essential to understanding what *Imamanism* does and why it matters.

Collectively, these five concepts show that *Imamanism* is not simply a local version of familiar political thought. It provides an alternative understanding of politics grounded in alternative foundations. It prioritizes divine sovereignty over popular sovereignty, conceives of the polity as civilization rather than territory, understands identity as formed by history rather than granted by the state, views self-determination as the recovery of an existing right rather than the recognition of a new one, and treats history as an active political resource rather than a neutral background. These conceptual differences provide the analytical framework for this study and show how *Imamanism* makes an original contribution to comparative political thought.

CHAPTER III

MORO REVISITED: HISTORICAL ACCOUNT AND STRUGGLE TRAJECTORY

Before proceeding to the ideological analysis, which is the heart of this study, it is necessary to establish the historical foundation on which the findings are grounded. This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the Bangsamoro as a people, a political community, and a historical subject. It begins by examining the etymology of the term "*Moro*" and the politics of naming that surrounds it. It then describes the demographic, linguistic, religious, and cultural profile of the Bangsamoro people, tracing the internal diversity that coexists with a shared political identity. The chapter proceeds with a structured account of the Moro struggle across four major historical periods: the pre-colonial era of sovereign Sultanates; the era of Spanish and American colonialism; the period of post-independence marginalization and armed resistance; and the contemporary era of peace negotiations, autonomy arrangements, and the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Throughout, this chapter situates the historical narrative within the analytical framework of *Imamanism*, and demonstrating each historical episodes of the Moro experience reinforces the claim that Bangsamoro sovereignty was never surrendered, and that contemporary Moro politics is best understood as a continuation, rather than a rupture, of a pre-colonial political tradition. This contextual account is not a detour from the study's argument; it is the empirical foundation upon which that argument rests.

3.1 The Etymology and Politics of the Name "Moro"

The term "*Moro*" is a colonial construct, not a self-identification, and comes from the Spanish contact with Islam in the Iberian Peninsula. When Spanish arrived in Mindanao in the sixteenth century, they found Muslim communities and immediately associated them with the Moors which were the Muslim inhabitants of North Africa and Iberia whom Spain had spent centuries fighting in the Reconquista (Majul, 1973). The term "Moro" was not a neutral geographic or ethnic descriptor.

It was from the very beginning a political and religious label that coded the Muslim population of Mindanao and Sulu as adversaries, infidels, and threats to the colonial Christian order (Gowing, 1989).

The semantic history of the term itself is a testament to the ideological importance of the Bangsamoro struggle. In Spanish colonial discourse, "Moro" connoted piracy, savagery, and religious deviance (Gowing, 1989) a projection that, as S. H. Alatas (2013) argues, served the colonial function of legitimizing domination by dehumanizing the dominated. American colonial administrators later transformed the label into a bureaucratic category, grouping dozens of ethnolinguistic communities under a single administrative designation that erased internal differences while marking the Muslim south as a problem to be managed (Abinales, 2000). The persistence of this colonial naming practice is itself an example of what Said (1978) identifies as the Orientalist archive: a body of representations that serves imperial interests by defining the colonized on terms that the colonizer controls. In the Bangsamoro context, the absence or scarcity of the Moro in Western colonial archives particularly the Rajahnate of Buayan, which resisted colonial contact with notable success must be read, as Alatas (2013) and Said (1978) suggest, not as evidence of insignificance but as testimony to the success of resistance.

The reclamation of the name "Moro" by the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s is one of the most significant acts of political self-definition in Philippine history. When Nur Misuari of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) adopted "Moro" as the self-identification of their people, they performed an act of epistemic reversal: a name imposed by colonizers to mark a people as inferior was transformed into a banner of resistance, pride, and collective identity. This reclamation resonates with what Frantz Fanon (1961) describes as the colonized people's recovery of self-definition as an essential dimension of decolonization.

Another, more explicitly political, evolution of this self-designation or self-identification is the term "Bangsamoro" derived from the Austronesian words *bangsa* (nation or people) and "Moro". The term "Bangsamoro" does not simply claim an ethnic or religious identity, but a national identity: the claim that the Moro

are a distinct nation with its own history, territory, governance traditions and sovereign rights. The use of “Bangsamoro” in peace negotiations, in the Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018), and in the name of the autonomous region indicates the partial acceptance of this self-definition by the Philippine state, though the question of whether “Bangsamoro” implies national sovereignty or administrative autonomy remains fiercely contested (Lingga, 2007).

In this regard, “Moro” and “Bangsamoro” are used interchangeably to refer to the Muslim peoples of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan as a political community whose identity is constituted by shared history, Islamic faith, customary tradition and a collective claim to sovereignty. The use of these terms does not pre-empt the question of political status, but reflects the self-designation of the communities concerned.

3.2 Demography and Culture of the Bangsamoro

The Bangsamoro are not a single ethnolinguistic group. They are a political community of peoples whose collective identity is forged on a common political history. Also, they shared Islamic faith that transcends internal divisions. This internal diversity is the key to understanding the complexity of the Moro political tradition and to interpreting the ideological narratives to be analyzed in the next chapters.

3.2.1 Distributions of Geography and Population

The population of the Bangsamoro is estimated to be around five (5) to six (6) million, or about five (5%) percent of the total population of the Philippines. However, estimates vary due to the difficulties of census-taking in conflict-affected areas (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). The Bangsamoro homeland, previously known as the Bangsamoro ancestral domain, includes the island of Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and the island of Palawan. These territories are geographically and culturally distinct from the northern and central Philippines, separated by history, religion and political tradition as much as geography.

The current BARMM administrative area consists of four mainland Mindanao provinces (Maguindanao del Norte, Maguindanao del Sur, Lanao del Sur, and Basilan), the island province of Tawi-Tawi, and 63 barangays in Lanao del

Norte and North Cotabato. It is not the full ancestral domain historically claimed by the Bangsamoro, and this is a matter of political wrangling and negotiation.

3.2.2. Etno-linguistic Communities

The Bangsamoro comprises 13 recognized Muslim ethnolinguistic groups, each with its own language, customary traditions, and historical political organization. They are Magindanaon, Maranao, Tausog, Yakan, Iranun, Kalibugan, Kalagan, Sangil, Palawani, Molbog, Jama Mapun, Sama and Badjao. Each of these groups has its own language, adat (customary law), and historical political organization, but all share participation in the broader Islamic political culture that defines Bangsamoro collective identity.

3.2.3 Religion, Law and Culture

Islam is the defining element of the Bangsamoro's collective identity. The Islamization of the Sulu Archipelago began in the fourteenth century, with the arrival of the Arab missionary Tuan Mashaika (also known as Makdum) around 1380 and the founding of the Sultanate of Sulu by Abu Bakr (Rajah Baginda) around 1450 (Saleeby, 1905). Trade networks and missionary activity brought Islam to mainland Mindanao, with the Sultanate of Magindanao founded in the early sixteenth century and the Maranao sultanates subsequently established.

In addition, “Daulat,” a conception of sovereignty based on genealogical descent, ethical governance, and the ability to sustain diplomatic and trade networks, is the basis of legitimacy for Malay-Islamic political formations, according to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1972, 1980), and not colonial recognition H. Alatas (1972). This principle of Islamic political legitimacy is directly embodied in the sultanate system and pre-colonial governance traditions of the Bangsamoro people.

3.2.4 Political Organization: The Polycentric World of the Pulangi and the Principle of Legitimacy-Based Authority

Pre-colonial and colonial Bangsamoro political organization was based on the Sultanate and Rajahnate systems forms of Islamic and Indic-influenced governance in which political and religious authority were fused in the person of

the ruler, who served as the temporal representative of the Islamic law and as the custodian of the community's political sovereignty. Recent historiography requires a necessary counteractive assumption that this political world was organized around a single center. Scholars working with Dutch VOC archives, Spanish chronicles, and Mindanaon tarsilas have convincingly shown that the Pulangi River world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in fact polycentric, organized around multiple sovereign polities in cooperative and competitive relation to one another (Andaya, 1993; Laarhoven, 1989; Warren, 2007).

the Rajahnate of Buayan was a sovereign inland polity, along with the Sultanate of Magindanao and the Sultanate of Sulu, the most significant. The Rajahnate of Buayan's historical significance has been systematically under-represented in mainstream Philippine historiography.

Before the institutionalization of the coastal Sultanates, Buayan constituted a Rajahnate around its own structures of governance, the Datu class, trade networks, and military capacity, holding influence over the upper and middle reaches of the Pulangi basin, extending into Sarangani and Davao (Blair & Robertson; Saleeby, 1905). Historically Buayan is the senior and more established center of political authority in the Pulangi world, its political order predating the formalization of the Magindanao Sultanate.

The strongest evidence of Buayan's sovereignty is found in the archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Dagh-Register (Daily Register) records of the VOC, and is often cited through Laarhoven's research. The Dutch had no political interest in centralizing Mindanao authority for colonial administration, and recorded the Mindanao political landscape with a commercial and diplomatic pragmatism missing in Spanish sources. The VOC documents regularly mention "*het rijk van Bojan*" (the kingdom of Buayan) and "*de inlandse macht van Boëjan*" (the inland power of Buayan), language reserved in the Dutch administrative and commercial world for entities that exercised their own sovereignty, territoriality and diplomatic capacity. Most importantly, a mid-seventeenth century Dagh-Register entry states clearly that "*De koning van Bojan is niet onderhorig aan Mindanao*" (The king of Buayan is NOT under the ruler of Magindanao). There is not a single

Dutch document that labels Buayan as "*onderhorig*" (subordinate) to Magindanao (Laarhoven, 1989).

Central to the political architecture of the Pulangi world was Rajah Buayan Silongan of Buayan, uncle of Kapitan Laut Buisan, and grandfather of Sultan Muhammad Dipatuan Kudarat, the greatest of the Magindanaon rulers. This genealogical relationship is politically decisive. It means that the Magindanao Sultanate drew its most prestigious lineage not from an independent source but from the older Buayan royal line. Far from being Magindanao's subordinate, Buayan was Magindanao's senior kinship authority, a relationship of allied kin-polities rather than of hierarchy and subordination (Andaya, 1993; Laarhoven, 1989). As VOC maps of the seventeenth century clearly delineate the territories of "*Mindanao*" and "*Bojan*" as separate political entities, the colonial narrative of a single Magindanaon dominance over the Pulangi region is revealed as a later and politically motivated simplification.

The relationship between Buayan and Magindanao was neither a permanent alliance nor a permanent rivalry, but rather strategic cooperation and competition, depending on circumstances, a characteristic pattern of polycentric political systems. More receptive to Dutch and Spanish commercial and diplomatic pressure, coastal Magindanao at times accommodated Western interests. This strategic autonomy, the selection of allies based on interest rather than proximity, is in itself a manifestation of Buayan's sovereign foreign policy capacity.

Each of these polities, the power of the Sultan was not absolute but consultative, exercised within a system in which a council of Datus and the normative constraints of both Shari'ah and Adat had a role to play. Datu authority was based on acknowledged social standing, genealogical status, Islamic learning and the capacity to meet the responsibilities of leadership through providing protection, mediating disputes and upholding the community's bonds of solidarity rather than electoral system or bureaucratic appointment (McKenna, 1998; Warren, 2007). This idea of authority based on moral standing, and recognized legitimacy rather than formal institutional position, is the historical basis of what this research calls "*legitimacy-based authority*" in the context of *Imamanism*, and is a key

feature of Moro political culture that continues to inform the way Moro leaders today conceptualize and justify their political claims.

3.3 The Road of Resistance: Historical Perspective

The Bangsamoro political struggle is not new phenomenon. It is the latest manifestation of a political tradition dating back to the pre-colonial period, and a tradition which has continued, often in the face of extreme adversity, for more than five centuries of colonial and post-colonial history. This section traces that trajectory through six major periods of history, demonstrating how each has shaped and reinforced the ideological commitments that constitute *Imamanism*.

Table 3.1 The Road of Resistance: Historical Perspective

Period	Key Events and Developments
c. 1380–1565	Pre-colonial Islamic sultanates: Islamization of Sulu and Mindanao; establishment of Rajahnate of Buayan, Sultanate of Sulu, Sultanate of Maguindanao, and Maranao confederation; Pulangi world as polycentric multi-state system
1565–1898	Spanish colonial period: continuous Moro-Spanish Wars; Figueroa expedition repelled by Buayan (1596); Treaty of Buayan (1605) recognizing Moro sovereignty; Moro territories never fully conquered
1898–1946	American colonial period: Bates Treaty (1899) and abrogation; Moro Province (1903); Bud Dajo (1906) and Bud Bagsak (1913) massacres; Carpenter Agreement (1915); systematic land dispossession of Moro communities
1946–1968	Philippine independence: Moro incorporation without consent; Quezon's 1936 Executive Order dissolving sultanate recognition; Jabidah Massacre (1968) — catalyst for armed mobilization
1969–1976	Formation of MNLF (1969); Bangsamoro Rebellion (1972–1976); Tripoli Agreement (1976) — first international recognition of Moro self-determination
1977–2014	MILF splits from MNLF (1977); Final Peace Agreement GRP–MNLF and ARMM (1996); MOA-AD struck down (2008); Framework Agreement (2012); Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014)
2018–present	Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018); establishment of BARMM (2019); transition period underway; questions of full self-determination remain contested

3.3.1 The Pre-Colonial Period: Sovereign Polities and the Islamic Political Order (c. 1380–1565)

Mindanao and Sulu had long been sophisticated sovereign polities of the larger political and commercial networks of maritime Southeast Asia, long before Spanish colonialism. The Pulangi pre-colonial political world was not the homogenous tribal landscape imagined by later colonial administrators, but a polycentric system of multiple sovereign centers, each with its own governance traditions, military capacity, diplomatic networks and territorial claims.

The oldest and most established of these polities was the Rajahnate of Buayan. The Buayan in the upper and middle reaches of the Pulangi basin-controlled river trade networks and regional alliances, and had its own governance, military and diplomatic relations well before the formal institutionalization of the coastal sultanates (Blair & Robertson, 1903; Saleeby, 1905). The Dutch recognized Buayan as a fully sovereign *rijk*, a kingdom, and not a tributary or subordinate of any neighbouring polity, as Laarhoven (1989) and the VOC archive sources confirm.

In about 1450, the Sultanate of Sulu was established by Abu Bakr (Rajah Baginda), which developed diplomatic relations with the Chinese empire, Brunei, Java and other regional powers, engaged in extensive maritime trade, and exercised effective sovereignty over a vast maritime domain (Warren, 2007). The important scholar on the political history of this Sultanate is Cesar Adib Majul (1973), who showed that it was an independent sovereign polity, integrated into the regional Islamic civilization of maritime Southeast Asia, not a peripheral tribal formation awaiting the organizing principle of colonial modernity.

The Sultanate of Magindanao, established early in the sixteenth century by Shariff Kabungsuwan, a Muslim missionary of Arab-Malay who had come from Johor, organised the political life of the Pulangi River based on Islamic principles. The arrival of Shariff Kabungsuwan is a foundational narrative of the Magindanaon political identity. It connects the legitimacy of Magindanaon governance to the authority of Islamic knowledge and the moral accountability of leadership before ALLAH SWT. The Sultanate had commercial and diplomatic relations with Borneo, the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay world in general. This situates

the Bangsamoro within a broader regional Islamic civilization that existed beyond the boundaries of the future Philippine nation-state. (Laarhoven, 1989; Majul, 1973).

This pre-colonial political order offers a clear understanding of *Imamanism*. The Sultanates and Rajahnate were sophisticated polities. They have their own legal systems, diplomatic traditions, economic networks and political philosophies. These are rooted on Islamic ethics and customary law. The pre-colonial political reality is the historical source of the contemporary Bangsamoro political actors' claim that their sovereignty derives from historical inheritance, not a colonial grant or post-colonial recognition. It is a claim of continuity, not invention.

3.3.2 The Spanish Colonial Period: Resistance, Diplomacy, and the Proof of Unconquered Sovereignty (1565–1898)

The arrival of Spanish colonialism in the Philippine archipelago in 1565 inaugurated more than three centuries of armed conflict between the Moro polities and the colonial state a period that Spanish chroniclers like Antonio Pigafetta, Francisco Combes and Antino de Morga called the "*Moro Wars*" and that Moro historian like Cesar Adib Majul, Samuel K. Tan and many others describe as the era of continuous resistance. This conflict is one of the longest sustained colonial wars in Southeast Asian history, and its outcome the failure of Spain to conquer or effectively subjugate the Bangsamoro, and is the historical foundation of the claim that Moro sovereignty was never surrendered.

The expedition of Esteban Rodríguez de Figueroa in 1596 provides the clearest and most extensively documented instance of the Bangsamoro's capability to defeat colonial military force. Figueroa sailed to Mindanao under a royal contract granting him the right to pacify and govern the island and assuming, as Spanish commanders consistently did, the pattern of easy conquest that had characterized their campaigns in Luzon and the Visayas. On reaching the Pulangi and entering Buayan's territory, he encountered organised resistance of a qualitatively different order (Blair & Robertson, 1903). The Spanish chronicler Antonio de Morga called the defenders "Buhahayenes" or a phonetic approximation of "Buayanes", or the people of Buayan and later scholars, including José Rizal in his famous annotations to Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1890/1962), identified these

fighters as the people of the Rajahnate of Buayan. This archival identification corrects a centuries-long misidentification and restores the Buayan to their rightful place as protagonists of one of the most consequential acts of anti-colonial resistance in Philippine history.

Datu Ubal of Buayan, who had slaughtered his own cattle days before for a communal feast and publicly swore to kill the Spanish commander, accomplished Figueroa's death (Argensola, 1609/1890). Then, Spanish priests labelled Ubal a "traitor," a label that reveals colonial presumption that Buayan should have submitted to Spanish authority. The characterisation is historically inaccurate and politically significant. It was the Figueroa expedition that had invaded Buayan territory uninvited, armed and with a royal decree to conquer. There was no war declared by Buayan. Ubal's act was not treachery but sovereign self-defence and the defence of an independent polity against armed colonial intrusion (Blair & Robertson, 1903; Majul, 1973). The technological asymmetry of the encounter—Spanish soldiers armed with muskets, steel helmets and shields against the Buayan warriors with spear, kris and kampilan, made the success of the Buayan defence the more remarkable, and demonstrates the extent to which strategic intelligence, terrain knowledge and the political will to resist compensated for material disadvantage.

The defeat of the Figueroa expedition had serious political repercussions. Spain's approach to Mindanao was limited to coastal forts and they were forced to drop the direct conquest. It was about cultivating local allies and negotiating rather than imposing. The Treaty of Buayan of 1605 entered into by Father Melchor Hurtado on behalf of Governor-General Acuña and Rajah Buayan Silongan was perhaps the most important documentary evidence of Buayan's sovereignty (Mastura, 1979). Under early modern European diplomatic protocols and VOC and Spanish colonial administrative practice, direct treaty negotiation occurred only between entities recognised as possessing an independent political will. The Spanish Crown would not send a representative to negotiate with a subordinate, but would send orders through an intermediary. The sending of Hurtado to negotiate directly with Rajah Silongan and the execution of a formal treaty is a legal and

diplomatic recognition by Spain that Buayan was a sovereign political entity (Mastura, 1979). Spain never formally annexed Buayan, it only recognised it.

In the larger picture, Spanish colonial policy could never really succeed in the conquest of the Bangsamoro land. Despite repeated military expeditions, the building of a chain of coastal forts, and the recruitment of Visayan auxiliaries, Spain was never able to pacify the interior of Mindanao or the Sulu Archipelago. The Moros responded with armed resistance, diplomatic manoeuvring and tactical withdrawal, and preserved the political independence of the major Sultanates in the colonial period (Majul, 1973). This is not just a military fact, but a political and ideological fact. It establishes the historical precedent that Moro sovereignty is not a creation of, and is not recognised by, the Spanish colonial government but a political fact in existence that the colonial state failed to eradicate. This is the historical foundation of the first dimension of *Imamanism*: the claim of (unconquered) sovereignty.

3.3.3 American Colonialism and the Construction of the "Moro Problem" (1898–1946)

The cession of the Philippines to the United States following the Spanish-American War inaugurated a new and more consequential phase of colonial intervention in the Bangsamoro homeland. Scholars such as Cesar Adib Majul (1973), Peter G. Gowing (1977) and Patricio N. Abinales (2010) argue that American colonialism pursued a far more comprehensive program of political, legal, and demographic transformation in Mindanao than the Spanish colonial regime.

The Bates Treaty of 1899, concluded between the United States military and Sultan Jamalul Kiram II of Sulu, recognized the Sultan's authority over his domain in exchange for nominal American authority. The treaty was celebrated by its American negotiators as a peaceful resolution of the "Moro problem," but was abrogated in 1904 on the grounds that it implied a recognition of Moro sovereignty that American colonial policy could not sustain (Majul, 1973). The abrogation of the Bates Treaty is, from the Bangsamoro perspective, the first of a long series of agreements entered into and subsequently abandoned which a pattern that shapes Moro political distrust to this day.

The establishment of the Moro Province in 1903 placed Mindanao and Sulu under direct American military administration and pursued pacification through military force, administrative centralization, and the destruction of traditional political authority. The campaigns at Bud Dajo (1906) and Bud Bagsak (1913) and in which American forces killed hundreds of Moro fighters and civilians that remain among the most traumatic events in Bangsamoro historical memory and are consistently invoked in political discourse as evidence of the violent origins of Philippine state authority over Moro territories (Majul, 1973). The most significant dimension of colonial intervention was American land policy. The Public Land Acts of the early twentieth century declared most of Mindanao “public land” for homesteading, which enabled systematic settlement of Christian migrants from the Visayas and Luzon into territories inhabited by Moro communities for centuries (McKenna, 2023). This dispossession was accompanied by the systematic dismantling of traditional Moro political institutions. Under Governor-General Manuel Quezon’s Commonwealth administration in 1936, the colonial administrative offices that replaced centuries-old governance structures and rewarded those Datu families who collaborated with the new order formally dissolved the political recognition of the Sultanates of Magindanao, Sulu and Buayan Rajahnate in a decree (Tan, 2010).

The Carpenter Agreement of 1915 acknowledged the political authority of the Datu class in the American colonial administration. However, like the Bates Treaty before it, its protections were slowly eroded as policy moved towards the integration of Mindanao into a single Philippine colonial polity (Majul, 1973). As Philippine independence approached in the 1940s, Moro leaders made repeated representations to American authorities arguing that the Bangsamoro homeland should not be included in the independent Philippine Republic without Moro consent (Jubair, 1999; Majul, 1973). The petition of Moro leaders requesting either continued American sovereignty over Mindanao and Sulu, or a separate independence, is one of the clearest expressions of the Moro claim that their incorporation into the Philippine state was never consensual (Tan, 2010) and that is the foundational claim of *Imamanism*.

3.3.4 Post-Independence Marginalization and the Birth of Armed Resistance (1946–1976)

The Philippine independence in 1946 did not free the Bangsamoro. It brought a new form of subjugation. During the time right after independence, the cases of migration of Christian settlers to Mindanao became rampant, cases of dispossession of land became rampant, and cases of excluding the political representatives of the Moros became rampant. One of the famous cases in which the Moros were persecuted and forced into fighting was the Jabidah Massacre on March 18, 1968. The Jabidah massacre was an event where Filipino Muslim soldiers who had been recruited in an operation intended to destabilize the Malaysian government in Sabah were killed by their own superior officers since they refused to do anything against other Muslims. This massacre resulted in the death of about 28 to 68 Moro youth. The massacre led to the formation of the MNLF, headed by people such as Nur Misuari. (Majul, 1973; Tan, 2010).

The MNLF, established by Misuari in 1969, was a new and openly nationalist formulation of Bangsamoro political demands. Misuari cast the Bangsamoro struggle in the political language of Third World liberation movements, as a national liberation struggle, the struggle of a distinct nation for self-determination against a colonial state. However, the situation was altered drastically in September 1972 when Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law, followed by military actions against the Moro that killed about 100,000 people and displaced many thousands more, thus becoming one of the most severe battles in Southeast Asia after the region gained independence.

Finally, in 1976, the Bangsamoro's right to self-determination was internationally recognized for the first time through the Tripoli Agreement between the Philippine Government and the MNLF, signed under the supervision of the OIC (Abhoud Syed M Lingga & Syed, 2006; Tan, 1993). Marcos government never fully carried this out. This set a precedent that would be followed in later peace agreements: the pattern of promising autonomy while resisting genuine self-determination (Jubair, 2007).

3.3.5 Fragmentation, Bargaining and the Peace Process (1977–2014)

The failure of Tripoli Agreement was the first major division within the Bangsamoro liberation movement. In 1977, Islamic scholar Sheikh Hashim Salamat, who was educated in Cairo, broke away from Misuari to form what would become the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) (Galsim, 2022; Söderberg Kovacs et al., 2021). The personal and ideological split between the MILF and MNLF was about the Islamic dimension of the Bangsamoro struggle. Sheikh Salamat emphasising the Islamic dimension more than Misuari, who saw the Bangsamoro struggle as more of a national liberation movement but also a struggle for the right to live under Islamic rule, which resonated directly with the notion of the Islamic polity in the *Imamanist* paradigm.

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created by the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF. However, it was chronically underfunded, politically dominated by traditional elites, and its territory was much smaller than the Bangsamoro ancestral domain. Its failure confirmed the MILF's argument that genuine Bangsamoro self-determination was not possible through Philippine administrative devolution (Abinales & Amoroso, 2017).

The 2008 Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), subsequently declared unconstitutional by the Philippine Supreme Court, underscores the ongoing structural tension between Bangsamoro aspirations and the limits of the Philippine constitution. The MOA-AD proposed a Bangsamoro juridical entity with “associative” relations with the Philippine state, a formulation that pushed further in recognising Bangsamoro sovereignty than any previous agreement. The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2012) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014) then laid down the legal basis for a new political entity with greater powers and, importantly, recognised the Bangsamoro as a people entitled to self-determination, and a major shift from the framing of the Moro question as an administrative matter of minority accommodation by the Philippine state (Söderberg Kovacs et al., 2021).

3.3.6 The BARMM Era and the Ongoing Question of Sovereignty (2018–Present)

Since 1996, the most important institutional developments in the Bangsamoro struggle were the Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018) and the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019. The BARMM replaced the dysfunctional ARMM with a new political entity governed by the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), chaired by MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim, and endowed with broader fiscal, administrative, and legislative powers than any previous autonomous arrangement.

The BARMM represents, from the perspective of Söderberg Kovacs et al. (2021), the culmination of decades of political struggle: the formal recognition by the Philippine state of the Bangsamoro as a distinct political community with the right to self-governance. From the notion of Aboud Syed M Lingga (2010) and Jubair (2007) more consistent with the framework of *Imamanism* that the BARMM represents the latest accommodation of Bangsamoro political claims within a constitutional framework that continues to deny the fundamental premise: that Bangsamoro sovereignty is not a product of Philippine law but a pre-existing political reality that no Philippine law can fully accommodate.

This tension between the BARMM as achievement and the BARMM as compromise is the defining political question of the contemporary Bangsamoro situation. It is a tension that exists not only between the Bangsamoro and the Philippine state, but also within the Bangsamoro political community itself. between those who regard the BOL as a historic achievement deserving of full implementation and those who regard it as a transitional arrangement on the road to a more complete form of self-determination. This internal debate over what the Bangsamoro struggle is ultimately for and whether the BARMM can deliver it is the immediate political context in which the ideological narratives examined in the following chapters are articulated.

3.4 The Historical Account and the Case for *Imamanism*

The historical account presented in this chapter provides the empirical foundation for the analytical claims of this study. Three dimensions of this history

are particularly significant for establishing the case for *Imamanism* as the appropriate framework for understanding the Moro struggle.

First, the pre-colonial history of the Bangsamoro, and the Rajahnate of Buayan in particular demonstrates that the Moro possess a political tradition of genuine, plural, and historically older sovereignty. The Pulangi world was not organized around a single center but around multiple sovereign authorities, of which Buayan was the oldest and genealogically most prestigious. Dutch VOC archives, Spanish chronicles, Mindanao tarsilas, and the work of scholars from Saleeby (1905) to Laarhoven (1989) to Majul (1973) meet on this conclusion: the Bangsamoro polities were functioning sovereign states, not tribal formations awaiting the gift of colonial order. This history is the foundation of the claim to (unconquered) sovereignty.

Second, the history of Spanish and American colonialism demonstrates that this sovereignty was challenged but never legitimately extinguished. The defeat of Figueroa at Buayan in 1596, the Treaty of Buayan in 1605, the abrogation of the Bates Treaty in 1904, and the petition of Moro leaders against incorporation into the Philippine Republic in the 1940s were all constitute historical evidence of a sovereignty that colonial power could not eliminate, only partially suppress. The history of agreements and their violation—from the Bates Treaty to the Tripoli Agreement to the MOA-AD—really shows how the Bangsamoro claim to self-determination has always been a step ahead of the Philippine state's willingness to recognise it. This gap is not a negotiating problem. It is an ideological problem. It is the problem of the incompatibility of the claim of the Philippine state to indivisible sovereignty and the claim of the Bangsamoro to self-determination grounded in history of unconquered sovereignty of the indigenous political orders.

Third, the history of the liberation movements from the founding of the MNLF in 1969 to the establishment of BARMM in 2019 essentially demonstrates that the Moro struggle is not reducible to grievance or reaction. It is a sustained, organized, ideologically coherent political project, articulated by leaders who draw on a deep tradition of political thought and who understand their struggle as the continuation of a pre-colonial political order. It is this ideological coherence where the coherence of a living political tradition, rooted in the Pulangi world of Rajah

Silongan, transmitted through the Sultanate era, and articulated anew in the language of self-determination on which *Imamanism* is designed to capture and analyze.

The contextual account provided in this chapter establishes the ground for the study's analytical chapters, which examine how the six dimensions of *Imamanism*; (unconquered) sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation, and legitimacy-based authority are articulated, debated, and transmitted within the contemporary Bangsamoro liberation movements.

3.4.4 The Bangsamoro Historical Record: Encounter, Tension, and Contradiction

The historical account presented in this chapter makes a strong case for the continuity of Bangsamoro political tradition. This continuity does not mean that the path was always smooth or free of contradiction. Four observations from the historical record itself. It is important to acknowledge before the findings are analysed.

First: The tradition itself began with encounter and change

The political tradition that *Imamanism* claims to continue was not always present. Islam arrived in Sulu in the fourteenth century and in Mindanao in the sixteenth century. This arrival changed everything. The governance, law, leadership, and the meaning of political authority were all reorganised around Islamic principles. The Sultanates and Rajahnate that *Imamanism* holds up as the origin point of Bangsamoro sovereignty were themselves products of this transformation. The practice was not created out of nothing, but rather through engagement with the larger Islamic world. Understanding this fact does not undermine the idea of continuity. This means the Bangsamoro political tradition has evolved and adapted without losing its true identity.

Second: The pre-colonial world was not unified

The Bangsamoro political landscape before colonization was not a single, organized state. The Rajahnate of Buayan, Sultanate of Magindanao, and Sultanate of Sulu were independent states. They sometimes competed with each other but were most of the time allied. While Buayan and Magindanao were related by blood, their rivalry centered on control of the Pulangi region. This internal diversity and competition are not a weakness in the historical record. It is evidence of a sophisticated and plural political world. However, it also means that the idea of a single unified Bangsamoro political tradition requires some careful reading. Simply because what existed was interconnected political traditions, connected by Islam and by intermarriage. Their own distinct interests and histories also shape this.

Third: Some Moro leaders chose accommodation, not resistance

Some leaders of Bangsamoro did not oppose colonial rule. During the American colonial period, some families cooperated with the new order. They were rewarded with positions as mayors, governors and administrators. These families became the political dynasties that would later dominate the ARMM within the structures of the Philippine state. They also used the language and symbols of Bangsamoro identity. This history of accommodation sits alongside the history of resistance and cannot be set aside. It explains why the concept of “*Kadatu a tinalima no madak'l*”, which means legitimacy-based authority, became central to the liberation movements. This was a direct response to those leaders who held the title of authority but had surrendered its moral content.

Fourth: Continuity is something the Bangsamoro people have actively maintained

The historical continuity argued in this study was actively kept alive through the oral transmission of resistance history within families and communities. The preservation of tarsilas that connected living leaders to the founders of the Sultanates and Rajahs. The deliberate work of the liberation movements in connecting the contemporary struggle to the pre-colonial political order. This active preservation is not a reason to doubt the continuity claim. Rather, it is the reason the claim remains politically alive today. *Imamanism*, as this study argues, is

precisely the ideological framework through which this work of preservation and transmission is organized and sustained. The Bangsamoro historical path is not continuous despite the tensions and contradictions in its record but it is continuous because generations of Bangsamoro people have chosen to make it so.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents and analyzes the findings of the study based on interviews and documentary sources. The findings are organized according to the six dimensions of *Imamanism*: (1) Unconquered Sovereignty, (2) Political Identity, (3) Islamic Polity, (4) Historical Continuity, (5) Self-Determination as Reclamation, and (6) Legitimacy-Based Authority. The chapter examines how these themes are reflected in the narratives of MILF and MNLF members and leaders. The main ideas, values and beliefs that inform Moro political thought and the Bangsamoro struggle are identified through thematic analysis. The findings are thereafter discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of *Imamanism* and the historical context mentioned in the previous chapters.

4.1 Driving Factors for *Imamanism*

The data from all fifteen participants across three organizational groups converge on four interrelated factors that explain not only that *Imamanism* became the frame for conceptualizing the Moro political struggle, but why this particular framework—rather than pan-Islamism, secular nationalism, or liberal minority-rights discourse—was the ideological form the struggle assumed. Understanding this distinction is analytically significant: it is the difference between documenting the existence of an ideology and explaining the historical and structural conditions of its production.

Table 4.1: Driving Factors for Imamanism

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
The Unresolved Historical Wound	Colonial Disruption & Post-Independence Continuity	All groups identify colonialism as the original rupture that destroyed Moro political institutions and Islamic governance. The Philippine state is repeatedly represented as a colonial heir that inherited rather than corrected these structures.
	Jabidah Massacre as Catalytic Event	Cited by all 15 participants as the single defining turning point, confirming that peaceful integration was insufficient and making organized resistance necessary.

	Persistent Poverty and Marginalization	The fact that the Moro problem persists in spite of political reforms across all groups is evidence that the structural roots of the Moro problem remain unresolved, and it explains why <i>Imamanism</i> remains relevant.
The Failure of Conventional Political Arrangements	Autonomy as Structurally Incomplete; Peace Processes as Co-optable	All groups describe autonomy as transitional and constrained by the Philippine constitutional framework. Peace agreements are viewed as partial achievements carrying the risk of co-optation and erosion of revolutionary consciousness.
	Institutional Politics Eroding Revolutionary Consciousness	All groups view autonomy as a transitional, constitutionally-limited construct in the Philippines. Peace agreements are seen as partial victories, with the risk of co-optation and the erosion of revolutionary consciousness.
The Threat of Historical Erasure	Dominant Narratives & Internal Youth Disconnection	For all groups, entry into formal institutions is perceived as necessary but risky because it threatens to sever the struggle from grassroots communities and their historical-moral foundations. Philippine national narratives erase Moro sovereignty and Islamic governance traditions externally. All 15 participants internalize youth disconnection from revolutionary history with similar urgency.
<i>Imamanism</i> as Ideological Response	Civilizational Reawakening, Critique, and Moral-Spiritual Vision	All groups define <i>Imamanism</i> as a critique of domination and a vision for the future. Reviving Islamic governance, collective dignity and historical consciousness as a living political framework, not nostalgia.

4.1.1 Factor One: The Unresolved Historical Wound

The most significant factor is the unhealed wound. All participants define colonialism not as a concluded historical event but as an initial disruption whose effects persist structurally. MILF Participant 1 expresses this most directly:

“Colonialism was not just about occupying land. It disrupted Moro political institutions, weakened Islamic governance and sought to make the Moro people a minority in their own homeland.”

-MILF Participant 1

MILF Participant 3 situates this to a civilizational level, explaining how colonial and postcolonial structures *“attempted to delegitimize Moro political*

identity and normalize dependency within centralized governance systems". The destruction was described as political and spiritual by Participant 3 of the MNLF Misuari Faction (MNLF-MF). He emphasizes that *"the struggle was not just military but spiritual and civilizational because they fought for their religion, their country, and their political independence."* MNLF Sema Faction (MNLF-SF) Participants 2 and 5 argue that American colonial policies institutionalized the marginalization of the Moro. The land redistribution and administrative centralization, a pattern which the Philippine state inherited without correcting. According to Fianza (2013), colonial state policies redefined land ownership and governance that undermined indigenous Moro institutions, which facilitated settler expansion and centralized control. All groups describe the Philippine state as inheriting, not correcting, these colonial structures. Further, Bentley (1981) observes that post-independence Philippine governance structures inherited colonial administrative structures that perpetuated rather than resolved Moro political exclusion.

The Jabitah Massacre is mentioned as the most catalytic event in the narratives of all fifteen participants. MNLF-MF Participant 1 describes it as having *"directly produced the MNLF"*, and MILF Participant 2 sees it as *"proof that there was a need for organized resistance"*. MNLF-SF Participant 5 adds that *"it made many Moros believe that peaceful integration was not enough."* Both MILF and MNLF groups mention persistent poverty and marginalization despite political reforms as proof that the deeper structural roots of the Moro problem are not being addressed.

4.1.2 Factor Two: The Failure of Conventional Political Arrangements

All groups define autonomy as structurally incomplete and restricted by the constitutional structure of the Philippine state. MILF Participant 1 calls it *"transitional rather than final,"* while MNLF-MF Participant 3 cautions that *"peace without justice cannot fully solve the Bangsamoro question."*

MNLF-SF Participant 5 notes with particular honesty:

"Autonomy was still limited in scope simply because ultimate sovereignty lies with the central government, regardless of any autonomous arrangements put in place"

-MNLF-SF Participant 5

MNLF-MF Participant 1 warns that *"peace processes can become instruments of co-optation if they cut leaders off from the aspirations of the grassroots and the principles of the revolution,"* while MNLF-SF Participants 2 and 5 characterize the threat of agreements becoming *"symbolic rather than transformative."* According to Rocamora (2006), peace processes and institutional inclusion in the Philippines are often co-optation mechanisms that transform revolutionary movements into political actors under state control. Thus, all sectors view institutional participation with ambivalence: as a necessity but also as a possible threat to the progressive erosion of revolutionary consciousness and to the disconnection of leadership from the historical and moral bases of the struggle. As Ferrer (2005) argues, the unitary structure of the Philippine Constitution continues to limit autonomy arrangements in Muslim Mindanao and prevents genuine self-determination.

4.1.3 Factor Three: The Threat of Historical Erasure

Historical erasure operates at two levels simultaneously. Externally MNLF Participant 1 says *"erasure of Moro sovereignty and identity within dominant national narratives."* Participant 3 of the MNLF-MF refers specifically to the erasure of *"Islamic governance traditions"*. This *"historical amnesia,"* which *Imamanism* must cure, says MNLF-SF Participant 5. Casiño (2012) argues that mainstream state narratives tend to foreground conflict and security in Mindanao, thus obscuring the longer history of autonomous governance and political complexity. Almost with equal urgency, all fifteen participants mention the disconnection of younger generations from the historical meaning of the struggle as a major driver of *Imamanism's* continuing relevance internally. MNLF-MF Participants 4 and 5 observe that many young Moros *"know about current institutions but not the sacrifices and historical experiences that created them."*

4.1.4 Factor Four: Why *Imamanism* Specifically—The Ideological Logic of Its Emergence

The fourth factor has to be dealt with more analytically than the previous three, for it poses the most intellectually interesting question: not that an ideological framework developed, but why *Imamanism* in particular developed in the form it did. MILF Participant 1 describes it as “a critique of historical domination and a vision for political restoration.” MILF Participant 3 calls it “the revival of historical memory, Islamic governance, collective dignity and political identity.” Participant 5, a MILF, gives the clearest expression:

“It is not only a political ideology but a moral and spiritual movement to restore justice, unity, and accountability in the Bangsamoro society.”

-MILF Participant 5

MNLF-MF Participant 3 provides the most theologically elaborated definition, defining the *Imamanism* as “*restoration of the awareness that the Bangsamoro people historically had Islamic civilization, governance and political legitimacy.*” Participants 4 and 5 of the MNLF-SF consistently refer to it as “*using historical consciousness to position future political aspirations and not only glorify the past.*”

The analytical question is what accounts for this particular ideological configuration? The answer lies in the unacceptability of the three most obvious alternatives. While **Pan-Islamism** offers the moral authority of Islam, it lacks the historical specificity of the Bangsamoro’s pre-colonial sovereignty claims, and cannot account for why this people, in this territory, have a distinct claim to self-determination. **Secular ethnonationalism** captures the territorial and identity dimensions but severs them from the Islamic governance tradition that constitutes the Moro polity’s historical form of authority—and therefore cannot account for why Islamic principles of Amanah and Shura are not peripheral but central to Bangsamoro political legitimacy. **Liberal minority-rights** discourse speaks of inclusion and recognition, but, as all fifteen participants make clear, it concedes the

legitimacy of the Philippine state's sovereignty over Bangsamoro territory—the very premise that *Imamanism* refuses.

I read *Imamanism* to have assumed the specific ideological form it does simply because it is. This is only available framework that holds all three registers together, namely; (1) civilizational scope (the entire pre-colonial political order), (2) Islamic moral authority (governance based on divine accountability) and (3) historical specificity (the particular trajectory of the Bangsamoro from the Sultanates to the present. This understanding support by Al-Attas (1978) who highlights that the structures of Islamic governance do not accept the separation of political authority from the religious-moral order, thus rendering a purely secular political vocabulary inadequate for a struggle whose legitimacy claim is itself rooted in Islamic civilizational continuity.

I should also be honest about a limit of this finding. All fifteen participants converge so closely on these same four factors that the convergence itself deserves scrutiny. Part of this likely reflects a genuinely shared political consciousness built through decades of common struggle. But part of it may also reflect that all fifteen are senior leaders within two liberation movements, trained in a similar institutional language, and that my own interview questions. They also framed around *Imamanism*'s six dimensions from the outset. It was likely shaped which factors participants reached for. I cannot fully separate a real ideological consensus from an artifact of how the study was designed. I treat the convergence as meaningful, but not as proof that no other account of these drivers is possible.

4.2 Sovereignity within the Discourse of *Imamanism*

The most consistently articulated theme across all fifteen participants is sovereignty. More specifically, it is the active claiming, performance, and assertion of sovereignty as a central organizing principle. They are not only discussing about sovereignty as a historical fact. But also constructing and performing it as a living political claim to organize the *Imamanist* worldview.

Table 4.2: Unconquered Sovereignty (Sovereignticity) within *Imamanist* Discourse

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Pre-Colonial Sovereignty as Historical Baseline	Sultanates and Rajahnate as Pre-Existing Political Legitimacy	The Sultanates and Rajahnate are described by all groups as fully constituted sovereign polities with Islamic governance, diplomatic relations, and territorial authority, historically prior to and independent of the Philippine state.
Unconquered Sovereignty as the Defining <i>Imamanist</i> Claim	Sovereignty Interrupted, Not Extinguished; Islam as Proof	All 15 participants universally agreed: the Moro were never fully conquered. Sovereignty is presented as broken but not destroyed. The strongest evidence of this is the survival of Islamic identity under colonial pressure.
Sovereignty as Collective Pride and Unity	Source of Dignity; Unifying Force Across Ethnolinguistic Groups	Unconquered sovereignty affirms collective pride and historical distinctiveness, and fosters solidarity across Moro ethnolinguistic lines by offering a common story of resistance, survival, and political identity.
Sovereignty in <i>Imamanism</i>: Restoration, not Revolution	Reclamation, Not New Creation; <i>Imamanism</i> as Ideological Custodian	Self-determination means returning historical rights to all groups. This claim is kept alive, we are told, by <i>Imamanism</i> as its ideological guardian—preventing sovereignty from being reduced to administrative autonomy or forgotten through institutional accommodation.

4.2.1 Pre-Colonial Sovereignty as Historical Baseline

Participants 1, 2 and 3 of the MILF describe the Sultanates of Sulu, Magindanao and the Rajahnate of Buayan as established sovereign entities. They had their own systems of governance, diplomatic relations and Islamic legal traditions. Participant 2 of the MILF notes that *“these political orders even maintained international relations before colonial intervention.”* The most theologically based articulation is from MNLF-MF Participant 3:

“The Sultanates of Mindanao and Sulu were not just tribal structures but Islamic polities based on Shari’ah principles, consultation, justice and communal responsibility”

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

MNLF-SF Participant 5 brings this historical baseline directly into the contemporary political argument: *“the Bangsamoro people did not become a*

minority in the Philippine state, but were assimilated into it through colonial and political processes that many Moros never accepted completely." MNLF-SF Participant 1 and MNLF-MF Participant 1 both frame sovereign prior existence as the key counter to reducing the Moro question to a minority grievance.

4.2.2 Unconquered Sovereignty: The Moral Bedrock

For all the fifteen participants, the claim that the Moro people were never completely conquered is the moral basis of *Imamanist* discourse. Key analytical distinction made by MILF Participant 1:

"It is a matter of historical and moral fact that there still exists Moro political legitimacy... Moro sovereignty may have been interrupted but never totally extinguished"

-MILF Participant 1

The pivot on which the whole *Imamanist* case turns is the difference between interrupted and extinguished. If sovereignty were extinguished, the political struggle would need to argue for the creation of new political rights—placing it squarely within liberal recognition frameworks. However, if sovereignty has been only interrupted, then the struggle is an act of reclamation, founded on prior right and requiring no permission from the state against which the claim is made. MILF Participant 3 describes the unsuccessful efforts of colonial powers to *"failed to erase Moro identity, Islamic consciousness, and the aspiration for self-determination even while occupying territory."* MNLF-MF Participant 3 frames resistance as simultaneously political, spiritual, and civilisational: *"the Moro people defended Islam, homeland, and political independence as inseparable aspects of Moro resistance."*

The most powerful empirical evidence of unconquered sovereignty singled out across all groups is the survival of Islam under colonial pressure. MILF Participant 1 and MILF Participant 3 both point to Islamic identity as evidence that sovereignty was never extinguished. As MNLF-SF Participant 5 explicitly states:

"Colonial powers could not erase Moro identity, Islam, or aspirations for self-determination"

The logic here is that if sovereignty in fact had been extinguished, then the civilizational order in which it was embedded would have been extinguished as well. Thus, the durability of Islamic identity, practice and political aspiration is accepted as the most accurate measure of the durability of sovereignty, not as a cultural fact but as a political one. This logic echoes Quijano's (2000) analysis of how colonized peoples retain subjugated knowledges and identities as political resistance and Mignolo's (2011) account of decolonial thinking as the reclamation and assertion of political epistemologies that colonial modernity tried to suppress.

4.2.3 Sovereignty as Collective Pride and Unifying Force

At the collective level, unconquered sovereignty is described as generating a unifying force across ethnolinguistic divisions. MILF Participant 3 describes how it *"strengthens solidarity among Moro communities."* MNLF-MF Participant 3 notes it creates *"collective identity that transcends group differences."* MNLF-SF Participants 2 and 4 describe it as constructing *"a shared political identity rooted in history, Islam, and self-determination."* MNLF-SF Participant 1 adds:

The notion of unconquered sovereignty provides the Moro with a strong sense of historical dignity and legitimacy. It reminds them that their identity did not originate from the Philippine state but from their own historical political systems and civilization."

-MNLF-SF Participant 1

In this case, sovereignty is integrative and structural and not simply a rhetorical device. To speak of an unconquered sovereign people, in terms of shared dignity and shared sentiments, establish a political community consisting of the Tausug, Magindanaon, Maranao, and other Bangsamoro ethnolinguistic groups without erasing their individuality. As Anderson (2020) argues sovereignty is what nations and political communities do when they use historical accounts to maintain collective memory and political legitimacy.

4.2.4 Sovereignty within *Imamanism*: Restoration, Not Revolution

Imamanism describes sovereignty that is something to be reclaimed. MILF Participant 1 articulates "*Self-determination as restoration not as creation*," MILF Participants 2 and 3 refer to the struggle as "*historical restoration*." MNLF-SF Participant 4 explicitly says:

"Our struggle is not about separation but about restoration and recognition."

-MNLF-SF Respondent 4

Imamanism is presented across all groups as the ideological custodian of this claim. They sustain it alive as a living aspiration and by preventing its reduction to administrative autonomy within the Philippine state framework. MILF Participant 3 explains it as "*preventing sovereignty to be reduced to administrative autonomy or forgotten through institutional accommodation*." MNLF-MF Participant 2 says "*make sure that the Bangsamoro struggle remains connected to its historical foundations*."

Unconquered sovereignty "*Dala masakop a kadatu*" understands sovereignty as a moral authority held by the community. It is not a legal status granted by outside powers. The findings show that all fifteen participants hold firmly to this understanding. They strongly argue that colonial rule interrupted but never destroyed Bangsamoro political authority. However, I must be honest for what this claim is all about. When my participants used as a proof that sovereignty was never lost because of the survival of Islam and community, they are making a political argument, not just describing history. They are deliberately using cultural survival as evidence of political continuity. This is the core move of *Imamanist* discourse and a powerful one. However, it must be read as an argument rather than a straightforward historical fact. I argue that this does not weaken the findings itself. It only shows that "*Dala masakop a kadatu*" is a living political claim that the Bangsamoro have actively maintained and transmitted across generations, not simply inherited.

However, the concept of transitional sovereignty, as formulated by Rodil (1994), seems to better characterize this phenomenon than the concept of decolonization. Moro governance has changed in its outward appearance, from Sultanate and Rajahnate to a resistance movement and the Ministry of BARMM, without compromising the continuity of its historical claim. If this interpretation of the claim “*Dala masakop a kadatu*” is taken into account, the claim has survived through transformation. The issue that Rodil’s theory cannot address is when the transformation of the claim becomes the replacement of the claim itself.

4.3 Political Identity within the Framework of *Imamanism*

In the *Imamanist* discourse, political identity is not presented as the result of state recognition, of constitutional provisions or peace agreements. For all fifteen participants, Moro political identity is uniformly expressed as something pre-existing, historically based and actively sustained despite external erasure and internal disconnection.

Table 4.3: Political Identity within the Framework of Imamanism

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Identity as Historically Constituted, Not State-Granted	Moro as a People, not a Minority; Rooted in Pre-Colonial Community	All groups explicitly reject minority status. Bangsamoro identity is framed as originating in the Sultanate and Rajahnate experience, historically and spiritually prior to any colonial encounter or state recognition.
Islam as the Core of Moro Political Identity	Islam as Inseparable from Identity; Proof of Political Survival	For all groups, Islam is a system of governance, not simply a cultural marker of Moro political identity. It is claimed that Islamic survival under colonial rule is concrete evidence that sovereignty was never extinguished.
Resistance and Suffering as Identity-Forming Experiences	Collective Memory of Resistance; Shared Sacrifice as Political Identity	The anti-colonial struggles (Bud Dajo, Bud Bagsak, Jabitah Massacre) and continuing displacement are not given as a historical background of Moro political identity, but as its essential content.
Identity Threatened by Erasure; <i>Imamanism</i> as Its Defense	Dominant Narratives as Threat; <i>Imamanism</i> Restoring Pride and Dignity	Externally, national narratives erase Islamic governance traditions and reduce Moro people to conflict. <i>Imamanism</i> is introduced as a recovery of historical consciousness and as an identity among the youth that links them to the current Bangsamoro mission.
Intergenerational Transmission of Political Identity	Teaching Younger Generations;	All 15 participants describe the transmission of historical consciousness as a core task of leadership. <i>Imamanism</i> is posed as the vehicle

	<i>Imamanism as Identity Framework for Youth</i>	that links the younger Moro to the historical mission of the Bangsamoro struggle
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4.3.1 Rejection of Minority Status

The basic stand by all groups is to refuse minority status. MILF Participant 1 eloquently describes *Imamanism* as allowing Moro people to see themselves:

"Not simply as a marginalized minority but as a people with a historical political identity rooted in sovereignty and resistance."

-MILF Participant 1

MILF Participant 3 supports this by citing the Sultanate and Rajahnate as evidence of a *"long history of political organization, Islamic civilization and resistance."* MNLF-MF Participant 1 argues that *"the Bangsamoro were never a minority created by the Philippine state."* MNLF-SF Participants 2 and 5 describe the whole Moro problem as *"the denial of Moro nationhood rather than minority grievance."*

This rejection has analytical implications, in particular. In Wirth's (1945) classic definition of minority groups they are communities who are treated unequally in a social order whose ultimate legitimacy is not questioned. The *Imamanist* rejection of minority status is a rejection of this framing altogether: it challenges not merely the treatment of the Bangsamoro within the Philippine state but the premise that the Philippine state possesses legitimate sovereign authority over Bangsamoro territory. Moro identity is rooted in a historical consciousness of sovereignty that sees the Bangsamoro not as a minority group within an existing polity but a political community with precolonial statehood that was incorporated without consent (McKenna, 2023).

4.3.2 Islam as the Core of Moro Political Identity

Islam is proven to be the core of Moro identity, not just a part, across all three groups of participants. MILF participant 1, 2, and 3 all describe Islam as a complete system of governance, law, leadership, and social order. Majul (1973) argues that Islam in Mindanao survived and remained a central source of political authority, identity, and resistance. MILF Participant 3 clearly says that *"governance*

loses its legitimacy when it is not connected to Islamic ethical principles." MNLF-MF Participant 3 says:

"Islam became the foundation of Moro civilization, governance and collective identity from the moment it arrived in Mindanao and Sulu. So, the defence of Islam and the defence of sovereignty are the same.

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

The analytical significance that the defence of Islam means defence of sovereignty itself makes the political struggle a moral and religious obligation, not merely a strategic or historical. MILF Participant 5 draws out this implication by describing the Moro struggle as tied to *"the Islamic obligation to protect the Ummah in Mindanao from oppression and injustice."* Majul (1973) demonstrates that Islam in the southern Philippines survived Spanish, American, and Philippine state rule precisely because it was not merely a spiritual practice but the organizational principle of Moro political life. This is why its survival under colonial pressure constitutes evidence of political, not only religious, persistence.

4.3.3 Resistance and Sacrifice as Identity-Forming Experiences

Fundamentally, it presented not only the historical background but also the content of Moro political identity, the history of the anti-colonial struggle: the Battle of Tampakan, Padang Karbala, Bud Dajo, Bud Bagsak, the Jabidah Massacre, the Palimbang Massacre, and the MNLF and MILF revolutions. The MILF Participants 1 and 2 both frame the struggle as *"built upon sacrifice and the aspiration to restore dignity."* The MNLF-MF Participant 5 anchor identity in personal witnessing of displacement and militarization:

I also speak as a witness to the suffering of the Moro communities during the armed conflict, displacement, militarisation and social discrimination.

-MNLF-MF Participant 5

MNLF-SF Participant 4 specifically refers to the *"cultural, religious and psychological dimensions of the struggle alongside the political,"* asserting it is *"not only armed or political; it is also cultural, religious and psychological."* Casiño

(2012) emphasizes that massacres, displacement and militarization are not peripheral, but central to the formation of Moro political identity and historical realization. In *Imamanist* discourse oppression and marginalization are not merely narrated as victimhood but transformed into the moral element of political legitimacy. This is what Scott (1985) identifies as the political use of historical memory among subordinated communities.

4.3.4 *Imamanism* as Defence Against Erasure and Transmitter of Identity

The threat to Moro political identity happens at both external and internal levels. Externally, MILF Participant 1 describes Philippine national narratives as erasing Moro sovereignty and identity. MNLF-MF Participant 3 specifically identifies the erasure of Islamic governance traditions. Internally, disconnection of younger generations is named with equal urgency. MILF Participant 4 frames his own role:

"My role is therefore not only political but also educational and ideological because I believe younger generations must understand that the Bangsamoro struggle is deeply connected to identity, history, Islam, and the aspiration for meaningful self-governance."

-MILF Participant 4

The key point raised by MNLF-MF Participant 1 is *"the importance to remind younger generations that the political arena in which they now occupy is the result of revolution rather than voluntary gift from the state."* The task which is highlighted here plays a crucial role in sustaining political communities, as argued by Anderson (2020). According to him, it consists of *"converting memories of the past into obligations within the present."* Finally, according to MNLF-SF Participant 3, *Imamanism* represents the instrument for *"reviving the pride and re-legitimizing the Moro political cause,"* at once being both a tool of resisting other nations' attempts of erasing their political community and maintaining its existence across generation shifts.

Political Identity “*P'gkilalan lon a kamal*” holds that Bangsamoro political identity was built from within—through shared faith, history, and governance traditions—long before any state recognized it, and my findings consistently show that all participants reject minority status and ground their identity in the pre-colonial Sultanates and Rajahnate rather than in Philippine constitutions. I must honestly acknowledge, however, that the unified Bangsamoro identity my informants assert is itself something that had to be built—the Bangsamoro comprises thirteen ethnolinguistic groups with their own distinct traditions, and the sense of a single shared political identity “*P'gkilalan lon a Kamal*” is the result of deliberate work by the liberation movements, not a natural fact that has always existed. I read my informants' claims not as a description of a ready-made unity but as evidence of a political solidarity that has been consciously constructed and maintained—which is actually a stronger argument for *Imamanism*, because it shows that “*P'gkilalan lon a kamal*” is something the Bangsamoro people actively choose, not something they simply possess.

Chatterjee's (2020) definition of the inner domain is relevant in this context, particularly for the formation of identity within a culturally and religiously inner colonial power that was never fully mapped out. In this context, unity among the thirteen ethnolinguistic groups that produced “*P'gkilalan lon a kamal*” can be seen as an act of maintaining unity within the inner domain, which was only named and politicized later and not a product of modernity.

However, the Chatterjee (2020) idea describes unity in relation to the colonizer rather than disunity among the colonized. The 1977 MILF-MNLF split occurred within that very inner domain, not outside it. The language used by participants on both sides includes Islamic discourse, the concept of Adat, and genealogy, though their interpretations of these are opposed.

4.4 Islamic Polity within the Framework of *Imamanism*

The conceptualization of the Islamic polity through the *Imamanist* perspective entails much more than defining Islam as a mere cultural attribute or as an aspect of personal religious affiliation. In each case, Islam is defined as a fully-fledged political civilization whose system of government is used to regulate power,

assess leadership, and direct institutions in political affairs. Such a stance aligns itself perfectly with what Esposito (1998) refers to as the traditional Islamic political paradigm, where Islam has not only been a guide of individual moral and personal conduct but also a system of political governance as well. On the other hand, it opposes secular-liberal ideology of keeping religion and politics distinct, which, according to Hallaq (2012), is not just theoretically impossible, but historically irrelevant to Muslim polities.

Table 4.4: Islamic Polity within the Framework of *Imamanism*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Islam as Civilizational Foundation	Islam as Historical Basis of Sultanate Governance; Islamic Governance as Benchmark for Legitimacy	All groups place Islamic governance at the center of Moro political legitimacy. The Sultanates and Rajahnate are described as communities constituted by Islamic principles—governance, law, diplomacy, and social order integrated under Shari'ah.
Islamic Authority as Morally Superior to State Authority	Divine Principles Over Bureaucratic Structures; Islamic Polity as Corrective	Across all groups, Islamic political authority is framed as morally superior to purely state-based authority because it derives from divine principles, ethical governance, and accountability before Allah. Islamic polity is positioned as the corrective to corruption, injustice, and elite domination.
Islam as Comprehensive Governance, Not Private Faith	Public Political Order; Specific Principles: Justice, Shura, Amanah	Islam is consistently described as a comprehensive political framework—not personal religion—guiding governance, social order, and leadership ethics. Key operative principles named: Amanah (sacred trust), shura (consultation), Adl (justice), and communal accountability.
Islamic Polity and Modern Institutions: Pragmatic Engagement	Moral Transformation of Institutions; Islamic Authority as Corrective	All groups support engagement with modern institutions while insisting they be guided by Islamic ethical principles. Islamic governance is framed not as rejection of modernity but as its moral transformation and correction when institutions fail.
<i>Imamanism</i> as Revival of Islamic Polity	Restoring Islamic Governance; Institutional Politics as Threat to Islamic Principles	<i>Imamanism</i> is described as correcting the weakening of Islamic values caused by colonial and postcolonial structures. Institutional politics is consistently identified as a risk to the Islamic moral foundations of the Bangsamoro struggle.

4.4.1 Islam as Civilizational Foundation of Governance

MILF Participants 1, 2, and 3 all frame the Sultanates and Rajahnate as the physical, historical manifestations of Islamic governance. The most theologically sophisticated example is offered by MNLF-MF Participant 3:

"The Sultanates of Mindanao and Sulu were not simply tribal entities, they were Islamic states governed by the principles of the Shari'ah, consultation, justice and communal responsibility.... For many Moro people, governance without moral and Islamic foundations cannot attain true justice and legitimacy."

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

MNLF-SF Participants 4 and 5 confirm that the Sultanates and Rajahnate integrated Islamic teachings into governance, law, and social order. MNLF-SF Participant 5 draws the clear connection to the present: *"this is why many Bangsamoro leaders believe that governance should still embody Islamic moral values even in modern political systems."* Majul (1973) documents that Islam in Moro society functioned as a total civilizational system, organizing governance, law, leadership, and social relations in the Sultanates of Sulu and Magindanao. This historical reality that gives contemporary *Imamanist* invocations of Islamic governance their empirical rather than merely rhetorical authority.

4.4.2 Islamic Political Authority as Morally Superior to State Authority

Across all groups there is a clear moral hierarchy regarding the relative placement of Islamic political authority and state authority. More specifically, MILF Participant 1 states:

"In Islam, political authority is often viewed as morally superior to secular authority, as it is grounded in divine principles and ethical governance, not coercion or bureaucracy"

-MILF Participant 1

MILF Participant 3 argues that institutions should not be evaluated based on the legality embedded in the constitutional procedures of the state but on *"justice, morality and service to the people."* The most explicitly theological formulation comes from MNLF-MF Participant 3: *"Leadership as moral accountability before*

Allah (the Exalted One) and responsibility toward the Ummah in Mindanao.” MILF Participant 5 defines the political failure itself in moral-spiritual terms:

“From an Islamic perspective, political change can never succeed without sincerity, justice and accountability before Allah. Many leaders think that if governance is separated from the ethical principles of Islam, corruption and oppression will spread”

-MILF Participant 5

Islam is not just an identity for the Moros but as Bentley (1981) demonstrates, it is also a political ideology which shapes the Moros’ thoughts on governance, law and leadership. This view is further elaborated by Al-Attas (1978) who, in his classical Islamic political philosophy, shows that Islamic political leadership is evaluated based on its accountability to God or lack thereof, and not in purely institutional terms. This view has important practical implications. For it means that, from the point of view of *Imamanist* framework, the Philippine state has no right to exercise its legal sovereignty over Bangsamoro, since the latter is based on a different foundation.

4.4.3 Specific Islamic Governance Principles

Across all groups, the most frequently mentioned governance principles are Amanah (sacred trust), Shura (consultation), Adl (justice), accountability, and compassion. MNLF-MF Participant 3 explicitly names Shura as an operative governance norm rather than an abstract ideal. The most spiritually explicit description to Amanah is provided by MILF Participant 5:

“Leadership is Amanah, which means that it requires sincerity, humility, and responsibility before Allah, the exalted one.

-MILF Participant 5

The participant 4 from MNLF-SF further elaborates on the dimensions of these principles and he says *“A governance system without moral responsibility results in corruption, inequality, and abuse of power.”* These Islamic frameworks that have been presented by these three groups criticize the corruption, elitism, and immorality.

4.4.4 Pragmatic Engagement Without Abandoning Islamic Principles

All groups advocate pragmatic engagement with modern institutions. However, it always insists that those institutions be guided and corrected by Islamic ethical principles and not by purely constitutional or administrative criteria. MILF Participant 1 says that Islamic governance is not a repudiation of modern institutions, but a “attempt to morally transform and guide it in line with principles of justice and collective welfare.” MNLF-SF Participant 4 said that Islamic authority is seen as “complementary to governance and providing a moral framework for justice, community welfare, and dispute resolution.” However, MNLF-MF Participant 3 warns that:

"Institutional politics may weaken revolutionary consciousness and Islamic moral principles. Imamanism reminds leaders and communities that the Bangsamoro struggle is deeply connected to history, Islam, and collective dignity."

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

Within the context of *Imamanism*, the restoration that the framework seeks to accomplish is centred around the revival of Islamic polity, not peripheral to it. MILF Participant 1 describes it as rectifying “*the weakening of Islamic values caused by colonial and postcolonial structures,*” while MNLF-SF Participants 4 and 5 frame future *Imamanism* as steering Bangsamoro governance “*toward historical legitimacy, Islamic ethics, and genuine self-determination*”. The tension between pragmatic engagement and principled fidelity is not a contradiction within *Imamanism*. However, it is constitutive dynamic. The framework must engage with existing political structures in order to be relevant. It should also maintain its critique of those structures in order to be authentic.

Islamic Polity “*Kamal a Islam*” argues that religion and governance cannot be separated in Bangsamoro political discourse. Leading a community well means being morally accountable before Allah SWT. This is not simply compliance with the law but something much deeper. The findings show that all participants, whether

from the MILF or MNLF, invoke this understanding as the foundation of what makes leadership legitimate. I have to be critically honest, however. Though all participants in this research share the same language of Islamic polity, they do not agree on its exact definition. For example, the split between the MILF and MNLF in 1977 took place because they disagreed on the role Islam should play in the political movement. This dispute has not been settled to this day. I argue that the findings actually reveal not the existence of the “*Kamal a Islam*” notion as a coherent concept, but the way *Imamanism* helps to establish the common vocabulary to encompass various definitions of Islamic governance.

Hallaq (2012) argues that there is a fundamental structural incompatibility that goes beyond ideology. This is why it is impossible for any administrative Islamic polity, whether MILF, MNLF, or BARMM, to achieve compatibility between these two distinct projects. The split in 1977 is not a case where “*Kamal a Islam*” has yet to be defined; rather, it is a logical extension of Hallaq’s argument itself.

4.5 Historical Continuity as a Component of *Imamanist* Consciousness

Historical continuity is not just a theme in the data. It is a structural principle that allows *Imamanism* to become a politically and ethically consistent doctrine. Without historical continuity, *Imamanism* will be nothing but nostalgia. This historical continuity makes *Imamanism* a coherent political narrative. This contemporary Bangsamoro aspiration is the continuation of historically legitimate claims. Although it was disrupted to some extent, it was never extinguished. As Anderson (2020) notes, both national and political communities survive because of shared historical narrative. Such memory becomes a source of political legitimacy for them. According to McKenna (2023), the historical continuity of pre-colonial sovereignty and a continuous political identity make the idea of Moro sovereignty consciousness politically legitimate.

Table 4.5: Historical Continuity as a Component of *Imamanist* Consciousness

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
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History as a Living Political Resource	Historical Memory as Foundation of Political Claims; History as Ongoing, Not Closed	All groups describe historical memory as an active political resource—not background context. The Moro struggle is consistently framed as an ongoing historical process whose aspirations for sovereignty, justice, and self-determination remain unrealized.
Specific Historical Events and Figures as Evidence of Continuity	Sultanates and Rajahnate; Anti-Colonial Battles; Revolutionary Figures	All groups anchor continuity in the Sultanates and Rajahnate as the originating baseline. Anti-colonial battles (Bud Dajo, Bud Bagsak), the Jabidah Massacre, and figures (Silongan, Kudarat, Misuari, Salamat Hashim) are narrated as interconnected links in an unbroken chain of resistance.
The Narrative Structure of Continuity	History as Resistance and Survival; Loss Subordinated to Continuity; The Unfinished Struggle	Historical trauma is acknowledged but consistently embedded within a larger survival narrative. All 15 participants frame the current moment as still within the unfinished historical struggle—with peace agreements transforming the methods of the struggle, not concluding it.
Intergenerational Responsibility as Expression of Continuity	Duty to Transmit Historical Consciousness; Imamanism as Vehicle of Intergenerational Continuity	Transmission of historical consciousness is described as a core leadership obligation across all groups. <i>Imamanism</i> is defined as the ideological mechanism through which historical continuity is preserved, transmitted, and kept alive across changing political circumstances.

4.5.1 The Sultanates and Rajahnate as Originating Historical Foundation

MILF Participants 1, 2 and 3 all narrate the Sultanates and Rajahnate as defining the baseline of precolonial sovereignty against which all subsequent institutional arrangements are measured and found lacking. MNLF-MF Participant 3 tells the most complete narrative of continuity:

"I start with the advent of Islam in Mindanao and Sulu. Because Islam was the basis of Moro civilisation, governance, and collective identity. These Sultanates established diplomatic relations with neighbouring Muslim kingdoms and ruled according to Islamic principles and indigenous traditions"

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

MNLF-SF Participants 2 and 5 describe the Sultanates and Rajahnate as organized political entities that predate the Philippine as a nation-state. MNLF-SF Participant 4 contributes to the continuous narrative by associating Salamat Hashim

with Nur Misuari. By creating a bridge between MILF and MNLF history in a single unbroken Bangsamoro chain. Kadir bin Che Man (1987) and Majul (1973) consistently identify the Sultanates of Sulu and Magindanao, and the Rajahnate of Buayan, as the historical reference points for Moro political identity and sovereignty consciousness.

4.5.2 A Chain of Historical Events: Resistance, Survival, Persistence

All groups follow a chain of historical events as links in a continuous chain, beginning with the pre-colonial foundation: anti-colonial resistance under Spain and America; land and demographic transformations during the American colonial period; post-independence marginalization; the Jabidah Massacre; and the emergence of the MNLF and MILF. Galsim (2022) explicitly addresses the linkages of historical Moro sovereignty, colonial resistance, Islamic identity, and contemporary struggles for self-determination in MILF narratives. He argues that history is a chain of struggles. MILF Participant 1 calls this a story:

It is one of resilience as the Bangsamoro people continued to resist in the face of military campaigns, political betrayals, displacement and efforts to erase Moro identity from national narratives.

-MILF Participant 1

Participants 1 and 4 of the MNLF-MF explicitly state that the chain of sacrifice that connects the generations was forged in the battlefields of Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak. Three participants from MNLF-SF 1, 2, and 3, also refer to these events, together with the Jabidah Massacre, as the historical chain of resistance. Historical trauma; massacres, displacement, and land dispossession are acknowledged across all groups but always embedded within the larger continuity narrative, turned into evidence of sacrifice rather than defeat.

4.5.3 The Unfinished Struggle as Contemporary Expression of Continuity

The idea of the unfinished struggle is the most important contemporary expression of historical continuity. All fifteen participants believe that the current

political situation is still within the historical struggle. MILF Participant 1 makes clear that:

“Peace processes are often viewed as part of the ongoing struggle, not the end of the struggle,”

-MILF Participant 1

MILF participant 3 says peace agreements have been *“changing the means of the struggle instead of ending it.”* MNLF-SF Participant 5 places the current moment in context:

“The shape of the struggle may change, but the aspirations for justice, dignity, recognition and self-determination remain central.”

-MNLF-SF participant 5

The above conceptualization has a clear analytical purpose. It ensures that the BARMM cannot be considered the end of the Bangsamoro struggle, rendering *Imamanism* historically insignificant. The point here is that by making sure the struggle remains incomplete, the participants can ensure that *Imamanism* remains politically significant irrespective of the institutional arrangements made possible by the peace process. According to Söderberg Kovacs et al., the current political moment involving the Bangsamoro people should not be viewed outside the above context. More specifically, the Bangsamoro peace process must be understood within the context of the ongoing political history of the Bangsamoro people.

4.5.4 *Imamanism* as Vehicle of Intergenerational Continuity

Imamanism is presented as the ideological vehicle that ensures the continuity of history and its transmission to all groups. MILF Participant 1 says it is *“to continue to shape Moro political consciousness, to remind future generations that the struggle is not just political but also historical, moral and civilization.”* Söderberg Kovacs et al. (2021) contend that the current political mobilization of Bangsamoro is rooted in a long history of resistance, marginalization, and claims to self-determination. They position the peace process within a broader historical narrative by extending from colonial encounters to the present. MNLF-MF

Participant 2 states it ensures "*future generations remain connected to the sacrifices and historical foundations of the Bangsamoro struggle.*" MNLF-SF Participants 4 and 5 describe it as the mechanism by which historical continuity is preserved and transmitted.

Historical Continuity "*Nangimb't'lan a katudtulan*" does not claim that Bangsamoro history is a straight unbroken line. It claims that a shared moral commitment to unconquered sovereignty has persisted. The driving force across very different historical forms, from the diplomacy of the Sultanates to the armed struggle of the liberation movements to the institutional politics of the BARMM today. I must critically problematize these findings here. First, the 1977 MILF-MNLF split shows that there has been real disagreement about what this path requires. Second, the move of the struggle into the bureaucratic structures of the BARMM represents a form of continuity that carries the genuine risk of institutional co-optation. Certainly, the path continues but its moral foundation can be quietly hollowed out. I argue that identifying these tensions does not weaken the idea of "*Nangimb't'lan a katudtulan*" but will serve to define the purpose of *Imamanism* itself. It is the diagnostic tool through which the moral basis of the path remains visible despite changes in appearance.

According to Fanon (1961), decolonization is also seen as a political and historical endeavour to reconstruct a past that existed before colonial rule. This is another aspect of continuity in Chapter II's discussion of how continuity is itself a political instrument rather than a neutral record. The warning from Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983) remains completely relevant in the current situation: entry into the BARMM is precisely when continuity can be selectively assembled. Pointing out the constructed nature of the narrative does not undermine "*Nangimb't'lan a Katudtulan,*" which has been argued in Chapter II to the contrary, but rather requires that continuity be shown case-by-case.

4.6 Self-Determination as a Process of Reclamation and Political Restoration

The most analytically distinctive feature of *Imamanist* discourse shown in finding is the articulation of self-determination as a reclamation and not a new political demand. However, this is not a question of rhetoric because it is a

philosophical position. This position provides the strength of moral power for the Bangsamoro movement that is different from similar movements operating under the liberal recognition framework. By explaining why autonomy arrangements, however are consistently judged to be insufficient. Abhoud Syed M Lingga (2004) explains it as a reassertion of a pre-existing right to self-rule on the basis of historic independence and Islamic governance. In the same manner, Gutierrez, Gaerlan, and Stankovitch (2000) agree that it is at the core of the purpose and justification of the political struggle as understood by Moro revolutionary movements.

Table 4.6: Self-Determination as Reclamation within *Imamanism*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Self-Determination as Reclamation of Pre-Existing Rights	Restoration, Not Invention; Colonization as the Disruption; Reclamation as Spiritual Act	All groups conceive of self-determination as the restoration of historical rights disrupted by colonialism without the Moros' consent, not as a new political demand. Reclamation is also framed as a spiritual responsibility of MILF members and MNLF-MF P3: the restoration of Islamic governance and collective morality in the presence of Allah.
Self-Determination Distinguished from Autonomy	Genuine Political Agency vs. Administrative Concession; Autonomy as Partial and Transitional	While all groups make a clear and consistent distinction: autonomy is limited within centralized state structures, and ultimate sovereignty lies with the Philippine government; self-determination is real political agency grounded in historical legitimacy, collective identity, and the inherent right of a people to determine their own future.
Self-Determination as Comprehensive and Beyond Territory	Cultural Preservation, Islamic Identity, and Moral Governance; Restoration of Political Dignity	Political governance, cultural preservation, Islamic identity, ancestral homeland, and moral governance are all part of self-determination. Giving the reclamation narrative its moral force, its ultimate purpose in all groups is the restoration of collective political dignity.
Self-Determination as Continuing Process within <i>Imamanism</i>	Unfinished and Ongoing; <i>Imamanism</i> as Ideological Guardian	All 15 participants speak of self-determination as an ongoing hope, whose deeper goals are not yet achieved. <i>Imamanism</i> is the ideological guardian that ensures that this aspiration will not be diluted by institutional accommodation or diluted into the common run of political administration over future generations.

4.6.1 Three Logically Connected Claims

The reclamation framing rests on three logically connected claims appearing across all three groups. First, the Moro people historically possessed sovereignty,

governance, and territorial authority through the Sultanate and Rajahnate system. Majul (1973) emphasizes that the Sultanates of Sulu and Magindanao and related Moro political systems possessed organized governance. This territorial authority, and sovereign institutions existed before colonial incorporation. Second, colonization disrupted this pre-existing condition without genuine Moro consent. Majul (1973) also notes that the Treaty of Paris 1898 transferred Moro territories from Spain to the United States without consultation from the Moro Sultanates, despite their existing political independence. Further, Kadir bin Che Man (1987) argues that Moro rejected the legitimacy of colonial treaties because they were concluded between imperial powers without recognition of Moro sovereignty. Third, self-determination is not about creating something new but about restoring something that was disrupted. Gutierrez, Gaerlan, and Stankovitch (2000) emphasize that Moro revolutionary movements frame political struggle as the continuation of a historical demand for justice, dignity, and self-governance. MILF Participant 1 states most concisely:

"Many continue to frame self-determination as the restoration of historical rights rather than a new political invention." -MILF Participant 1

MILF Participant 3 elaborates it:

"The Moro people are not inventing a new political identity but reclaiming a disrupted historical condition."

-MILF Participant 3

For MNLF-MF Participants 1 and 2, the struggle is about *"restoring rights, dignity and political identity that were disrupted rather than creating entirely new claims."* MNLF-MF Participant 3 adds a distinct spiritual dimension, by defining reclamation not simply as political sovereignty but as *"the revival of Islamic governance, collective morality and historical consciousness."* This is articulated well by MNLF-SF Participant 4:

"Self-determination is understood here as a recovery of dignity, a redress of historical injustice, and a reclaiming of political agency, rather than the invention of a new identity or demand."

-MNLF-SF Participant 4

4.6.2 Self-Determination Distinguished from Autonomy

All groups carefully and consistently distinguish between “*self-determination*” and “*autonomy*”. As Participant 1 of the MILF most directly puts it:

“Self-determination, as opposed to autonomy or decentralization, which work within the bounds of a centralized state structure, is seen as authentic political agency based on historical legitimacy and collective identity”

-MILF Participant 1

MILF Participants 2 and 3 also support this, saying autonomy is attained in a certain degree within the Philippine state’s constitutional arrangement. MNLF-MF Participant 3 adds an Islamic dimension, and self-determination must include aspirations for the “*preservation of Islamic identity, moral governance and protection of ancestral homeland*” that autonomy cannot sufficiently encompass. MNLF-SF Participant 5 highlights:

“Autonomy did not work because in the end, sovereignty rests with the central government, no matter what autonomous arrangements are made.

-MNLF-SF Participant 5

Al-Attas (1978) grounds this distinction in classical Islamic political philosophy: Islamic governance frameworks resist the separation of political authority from the religious-moral order, and therefore cannot be adequately expressed within an autonomous region whose ultimate authority derives from a secular Philippine constitution. It must be noted that the separation between autonomy and self-determination is not just a matter of degree. However, rather, one of substance, considering that there is an underlying philosophical difference in their respective conceptions of the source of political power.

4.6.3 The Comprehensive Scope of Self-Determination

The definition of self-determination becomes more relevant in all groups. According to MILF Participant 3 “*Inherent collective right to determine its political future, political institutions, culture and social order.*” The most complete definition of self-determination is given by MNLF-MF Participant 3 “*Political*

governance, preservation of Islamic identity, moral governance, and ancestral homeland." MNLF-SF Participant 1 mentions having control over "*ancestral homeland and natural resources.*" Across all of the groups, self-determination is ultimately described as about restoring collective political dignity. As mentioned by MNLF-MF Participant 3:

"This struggle is not driven by mere pursuit of power and territory, but by the longing for dignity, justice, and recognition."

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

Imamanist self-determination contrasts with the other forms of instrumental self-determination, where the importance of resource and administrative control is highlighted. The aspects of cultural conservation, Islamic identity, good governance, and the native homeland associated with the concept of self-determination highlight the civilizational elements of *Imamanism*. This is not a struggle for political structures but a struggle for the conditions of Bangsamoro civilizational existence.

4.6.4 Self-Determination as Ongoing Process which *Imamanism* as Its Guardian

Imamanism consistently describes self-determination as a continuous process. All fifteen participants still situate the present political moment within the struggle for genuine self-determination. All groups describe *Imamanism* as the ideological guardian of this aspiration. MILF Participant 1: "*this is the only framework that reconnects the struggle with historical continuity, sovereignty and collective dignity.*" MNLF-SF Participants 4 and 5 describe it as:

"To sustain the hope for genuine self-determination for generations to come and to guide the future Bangsamoro governance with historical legitimacy, Islamic ethics, cultural identity and collective dignity."

-MNLF-SF Participants 4 and 5

Self-Determination as Reclamation “*Kap'bp'd'l sa ginawa ndo kabuwat paluman*” claims that self-determination is not a new right that the Bangsamoro people are asking for. For them, it is an old right that they are reclaiming, and that has been interrupted without their consent by colonial rule. The findings show that all participants frame the struggle in exactly these terms. They always distinguish reclamation from the more limited idea of autonomy within the Philippine state.

However, I should openly state one serious concern. A self-determination that is entirely focused on recovering the past may unintentionally limit what future generations of Bangsamoro people can imagine for themselves. The pre-colonial Sultanates and Rajahnate were not equal societies in every sense. Because the goal of reclamation should open up political possibilities rather than restrict them. I argue that “*Kap'bp'd'l sa ginawa ndo kabuwat paluman*” is best understood not as a demand to restore a specific historical form but as a living principle that gives the Bangsamoro people the right to decide their own future on their own terms and whatever shape that future takes.

Tully (2008) and Simpson (2020) describe indigenous sovereignty as operating both inside and outside the state at once, grounded in kinship and collective memory rather than territorial recognition—a framing that fits reclamation better than a purely forward-looking politics of emergence would. On this account, “*Kap'bp'd'l sa ginawa ndo kabuwat paluman*” does not have to choose between restoring the past and imagining a new future, because indigenous sovereignty was never confined to either register. What Tully and Simpson leave open, and this thesis does too, is which specific pre-colonial arrangements are worth carrying forward and which are not—a judgment *Imamanism* does not yet make explicit.

4.7 Legitimacy-Based Authority within the Framework of *Imamanism*

The description of legitimacy-based authority within the *Imamanist* discourse represents an alternative that goes well beyond mere formalism of legitimacy requirements established by the modern state. According to all fifteen participants, legitimacy is not contingent upon any recognition by the state; rather, it must meet the requirements of morality, history, and Islam, and thus exist

independently of the latter. According to Weber (1978), there are three types of legitimate authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. *Imamanist* legitimacy cannot be attributed to any one of these three types; rather, it includes elements from all three types—traditional legitimacy associated with the pre-colonial Sultanate system, charismatic legitimacy associated with sacrifice and struggle for recognition, and Islamic moral legitimacy based on God’s judgment and the observance of Islamic principles of morality that cannot be identified with any of the above categories. Esposito (1998) affirms that legitimacy in Islamic political tradition is also associated with moral authority, justice, and Islamic principles of ethics, while Al-Attas (1978) shows that moral responsibility before Allah, not purely secular institution, forms the basis for assessment of a leader.

Table 4.7: Legitimacy-Based Authority within the Framework of *Imamanism*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Legitimacy as Moral and Historical, Not Legal or Electoral	Moral Credibility Over Formal Recognition; Historical Commitment as Legitimacy Criterion	All groups consistently rank moral integrity, Islamic commitment, sincerity and historical dedication over electoral success or formal legal standing. Leaders who abandon revolutionary principles for personal or political gain are said to forfeit their legitimacy in the eyes of the people, no matter what their ostensible position.
Islamic Ethical Principles as the Basis of Legitimate Authority	Amanah (Sacred Trust); Shura (Consultation) and Accountability Before Allah	The most frequently invoked legitimacy concept across all 15 participants was amana, the sacred trust inherited from generations of mujahidin and ulama, and an obligation before Allah. Shura is identified as the operative governance principle that separates legitimate from authoritarian leadership.
Grassroots Connection as Legitimacy Marker	Proximity to the People as Legitimacy; Disconnection as Delegitimation	All groups speak of leaders close to communities as more legitimate than those caught up in institutional politics. Repeatedly, disconnection through elite co-optation, bureaucratic detachment, or the pursuit of personal interests is identified as a major source of delegitimation.
Institutional Legitimacy: Evaluation and Critique	Institutions Evaluated by Fidelity to Historical and Islamic Foundations; Corruption as Delegitimizing	Institutions are evaluated not by administrative efficiency and constitutional adherence, but by whether they genuinely serve Bangsamoro welfare, protect Moro identity, uphold Islamic values, and align with the historical aspirations of the struggle. All groups see corruption and elite-centered politics as key sources of institutional illegitimacy.
<i>Imamanism</i> as Guardian of	Reconnecting Governance with History, Morality,	Across all groups, <i>Imamanism</i> is characterized as the ideological instrument through which legitimate authority is maintained, restored, and transmitted; a

Institutional Legitimacy	and Collective Aspiration	critique of existing illegitimacy and a corrective framework to reconnect governance with Islamic ethics, historical continuity, and collective dignity.
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4.7.1 Moral Credibility as the Foundational Legitimacy Basis

Moral credibility, expressed in sacrifice, sincerity, integrity, and genuine commitment to the welfare and aspirations of the Bangsamoro people, is the basis for foundational legitimacy for all groups. MILF Participant 2 says explicitly:

"Legitimacy is not only about elections or legal personality, but it is also about moral credibility and historical commitment to the cause of the Bangsamoro."

-MILF Participant 2

MILF Participant 3 said *"Institutions should not be judged by legality or constitutional procedures alone, but also by justice, morality and service to the people."* This is the most explicitly theological formulation of this that MILF Participant 5 gives:

"Political authority is legitimate when leaders demonstrate sincerity, commitment to Islam, justice, humility, sacrifice and service to the people. "Legitimacy is not only a function of legal recognition or elections but also of moral credibility and accountability before Allah" -MILF Participant 5

The moral conception only substitutes formal criteria. MNLF-MF Participant 1 warns against leaders who *"give up the original principles of self-determination, justice and historical legitimacy for the sake of temporary political convenience."* MNLF-SF Participants 2 and 4 both state that authority is rooted in 'moral conduct and commitment to collective interests, not through formal elections or official positions. Legitimacy, according to Suchman (1995), refers to the belief that the authority is both *"proper"* and *"appropriate,"* as judged by commonly held moral standards—and explains when people feel that the leaders have lost their moral legitimacy through violation of common expectations. In the context of *Imamanist* theory, moral legitimacy is the fundamental legitimacy requirement, whereas formal electoral or legal legitimacy is merely an inadequate second-level requirement.

4.7.2 Islamic Principles as the Specific Content of Legitimate Authority

MNLF-MF Participant 3 explains Amanah as:

"The sacred trust passed down from generations of Moro mujahideen, traditional leaders, ulama and revolutionaries who fought for homeland and Islam against colonial domination."

-MNLF-MF Participant 3

The most spiritually explicit articulation of Amanah comes from MILF Participant 5:

"Leadership is considered as an Amanah from Allah the exalted one to serve the Bangsamoro people and protect their dignity, faith and historical rights."

-MILF Participant 5

Among MILF Participants 1, 2, and 3, MNLF-MF Participant 3, and several participants from the MNLF-SF, Shura (consultation) is listed alongside Amanah as an institutional governance principle. This sets apart legitimate from authoritarian leadership in concrete and evaluable terms. As articulated by MNLF-SF Participant 4:

"Legitimacy is expressed in Amanah, shura, justice, sacrifice and accountability before Allah and the people."

-MNLF-SF Participant 4

The practical importance of these principles in *Imamanism* is that they provide a particular, named standard by which to judge individual leaders but also institutional arrangements, including, importantly, the governance arrangements of the BARMM. An institution without Shura mechanism or whose leadership does not demonstrate Amanah is viewed in *Imamanist* discourse as having no legitimate authority regardless of its formal constitutional position. This gives *Imamanism* not only a historical narrative but also a diagnostic function. For them, it is a living structure for the ongoing assessment of political authority.

4.7.3 Grassroots Proximity as the Third Legitimacy Dimension

The third major legitimacy dimension is grassroots proximity or community engagement, which is described with equal consistency across all groups. MILF Participants 1, 2, and 3 assert that the more legitimate the leaders are when they stay close to the Bangsamoro people and are sincere in working for the collective welfare. MNLF-MF Participant 1 explicitly interprets proximity to the grassroots as a criterion of legitimacy. MNLF-MF Participant 4. From grassroots legitimacy:

"My engagement with the Moro struggle is based on years of community mobilization, political education, and maintaining the historical narrative of the Bangsamoro struggle within local Moro communities.

-MNLF-MF participant 4

All five (5) MNLF-SF participants find leaders who remain close to grassroots communities more legitimate than those absorbed in institutional or elite politics. Scott (1985) contends that legitimacy is often constructed through everyday interactions with communities of the oppressed and practices of resistance outside the formal state. Weber (1978) also provides the framework of charismatic legitimacy, in which authority is based on sacrifice, struggle, and symbolic recognition, rather than legal-rational office. Equally consistent is the converse, disconnection as delegitimation. MNLF-MF Participant 3 states explicitly that *"leaders who put their own interests above the collective good will eventually lose moral legitimacy in the eyes of many Moro communities."* Legitimacy has been defined by Suchman (1995) as the public's perception that authority is *"proper"* and *"appropriate"* in accordance with shared moral norms. He discusses how institutions or leaders are perceived to violate collective expectations and hence lose moral legitimacy.

As MNLF-SF Participant 5 stated:

"Failure occurs when agreements are symbolic, not transformational, or when political leaders are more concerned with self-interest than collective aspirations."

-MNLF-SF Participant 5

4.7.4 Institutional Legitimacy: Evaluation, Critique, and Imamanism as Guardian

The evaluation framework is the same for all groups at the institutional level. Institutions are not assessed in terms of administrative efficiency but in terms of how far they actually promote Bangsamoro welfare, preserve Moro identity, uphold Islamic value and remain grounded in the historical aspirations of the struggle. Participant 3 was the most straightforward:

"Institutions that are not linked to the revolutionary and historical roots of the Bangsamoro struggle are doomed to lose their legitimacy"

-MILF Participant 3

This is further repeated by MNLF-MF Participant 3 who stated that *"institutions should not be just bureaucratic structures but should be connected to the historical and Islamic basis of the struggle."* Corruption, elite-centered politics and bureaucratic detachment are identified as the main sources of institutional illegitimacy in all groups. Fanon (1961) directly argue that liberation movements are no longer legitimate when the revolutionary institutions are bureaucratic, elite-centered and detached from the original struggle. He condemns the post-colonial elites who substitute political compromise and self-preservation for revolutionary transformation. For MNLF-SF Participant 5, failure is precisely defined as *"political compromise without substantial transformation."*

Under this logic of legitimacy, *Imamanism* criticizes illegitimate authority and offers a framework for the restoration of legitimate leadership. MILF Participant 1 refers to it as *"the ideological basis that re-connects political struggle to historical continuity, sovereignty and collective dignity."* As MNLF-MF Participant 3 describes it, it keeps the Bangsamoro struggle *"bound to its moral, spiritual and historical foundations."* Participant 5 of MNLF-SF gives the most complete formulation:

"Imamanism brings together governance and history, morality, identity and collective aspiration and becomes the instrument through which institutional legitimacy is preserved, restored and passed on to future generations"

The combined effect of the three dimensions of legitimacy, moral credibility, Islamic ethical principles and grassroots proximity, is a conception of political authority which is at once more demanding and more encompassing than the formal legal criteria of the modern state. It is more demanding because it demands constant moral accountability, real Islamic governance and sustained community connection, not just an electoral mandate or a constitutional status. It is more comprehensive in that it includes not only political performance, but historical fidelity, moral character, and accountability to God. This conception of legitimacy is, ultimately, not a supplement to but a replacement for state-based legitimacy criteria – which is why *Imamanism* functions not as a demand for better governance within the Philippine state but as an alternative framework for evaluating what legitimate governance of the Bangsamoro people would actually require.

Legitimacy-Based Authority “*Kadatu a tinalima no madak'l*” holds that political authority is not legitimate because it wins elections or holds a constitutional position. It is legitimate because it has been entrusted to it by the people and is still subject to moral scrutiny under Allah SWT. The findings show that all participants apply this standard powerfully to the Philippine state, to the failed ARMM institutions, and to any leader who trades principles for personal or political gain. I must ask the harder question that this framework itself demands, however: do the MILF and MNLF leaderships meet their own standard of “*Kadatu a tinalima no madak'l*”, and has their entry into the BARMM maintained or quietly eroded the Amanah they claim to carry? I recognize that my informants' claims about legitimacy are not only political theory but also assertions of their own authority. I argue that *Imamanism* can only serve as an honest diagnostic framework if it also examines the liberation movements. It should evaluate them with the same rigor that it applies to the state.

Suchman's (1995) sociological definition—legitimacy as the perception that an entity's actions are desirable within a socially constructed system of norms—comes closer than Weberian typology but still under-describes what “*Kadatu a Tinalima*” requires, since it cannot on its own distinguish legitimacy granted by a

community from legitimacy owed to Allah SWT. Applied to the BARMM question, Suchman's framework would predict that participation in bureaucratic institutions could shift perceived legitimacy toward procedural performance over time, regardless of what MILF and MNLF leaders themselves believe legitimacy to be. Whether that shift has already begun is a question this thesis raises but cannot yet close.

4.8 Synthesis: The Internal Coherence of *Imamanism* as an Ideological Framework

The six dimensions discussed in this chapter—sovereignty, political identity, Islamic polity, historical continuity, self-determination as reclamation and legitimacy-based authority—are not distinct analytical categories but an internally consistent ideological system. The dimensions are supportive of and need each other: sovereignty is the fundamental claim, but it needs to be more than a declaration, it needs a historical continuity, a chain of events that can be documented to demonstrate that sovereignty was interrupted, not extinguished. Political identity provides a subject to the sovereignty claim, the Bangsamoro people, whose pre-colonial existence is the basis of the right. Islamic polity is the historical form of the sovereignty exercised, governance through Shari'ah, Shura and Amanah and the moral standard by which contemporary governance is evaluated. Self-determination as reclamation reinterprets the historical claim as a present political claim that is logically prior to and morally independent of any recognition offered by the Philippine state. Legitimacy-based authority is the framework to judge which leaders and institutions are really serving the Bangsamoro struggle and which have been co-opted, corrupted or bureaucratically divorced from its historical-moral roots.

This synthesis produces a depiction of *Imamanism* not as a static doctrine but as a dynamic political lexicon. This is coherent enough to sustain the ideological integrity of the Bangsamoro struggle across different political contexts. It is also flexible enough to engage with contemporary institutions, including the BARMM. At the same time, it remains rooted in the history of the Bangsamoro people, making it meaningful and motivating for the communities it represents. It is, in the fullest sense, a theory of indigenous political thinking. Arose from within the Bangsamoro

experience, in response to its own conditions. Providing its own account of sovereignty, identity, governance and legitimacy that need not defer to Westphalian state frameworks or liberal recognition theory for its legitimacy.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This research sought to understand the political struggle of the Bangsamoro through the ideological lens of *Imamanism*. This study aimed to address a critical theoretical gap in Bangsamoro scholarship: the lack of an analytical framework that explains how Bangsamoro themselves understand the meaning, legitimacy and purpose to their struggle. The study centred the voices and political vocabularies of fifteen key participants drawn from five participants—the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), five participants—the Moro National Liberation Front Misuari Faction (MNLF-MF), and five participants—the MNLF Sema Faction (MNLF-SF).

The six research sub-questions revealed a broadly shared ideological orientation across the three groups. However, the findings also show that the three groups do not mean exactly the same thing by *Imamanism*—they share the same framework but sometimes disagree on how to apply it. *Imamanism* is not a romanticized nostalgia, nor a simple call for secession or minority recognition. On the contrary, it is a political and ethical language that allows the Bangsamoro to articulate their struggles as the continuation of an unconquered political and civilization order. And to a certain extent, it may have been interrupted by the power of the colonizer but was never truly extinguished. The six interrelated features of *Imamanism* are not isolated concepts but an internally coherent framework that organizes how Bangsamoro interpret authority, governance and political legitimacy.

The data suggest four interrelated factors for the centrality of *Imamanism* as an ideological framework. First, the existence of the historical wound inflicted on the Moro population due to the colonial period and its persistence in the form of institutional continuity in the post-colonial Philippine state. Second, the failure of conventional political arrangements such as autonomy and peace agreements to address deeper issues of sovereignty and justice. Third, the persistent threat of historical erasure both by dominant national narratives and by the internal disconnection of younger Moro generations from revolutionary history. Lastly, *Imamanism* itself as a conscious ideological response to these conditions, functioning at once as a critique of domination and vision for political restoration.

The articulation that captures the spirit of *Imamanism* in the most general terms is sovereignty. One key organizing idea in this approach is actively asserting one's sovereignty. The moral grounding of the legitimacy claimed by all fifteen participants lies in the assertion that the Bangsamoro were not fully conquered. Sovereignty, for them, is always an interrupted, but not extinguished. The strongest evidence for this claim is the existence of Islamic identity despite all efforts of colonialism to suppress it. The approach differs from the conventional understanding of sovereignty, which relies on the state-centric interpretation of this concept. By placing Moro political power within the framework of continuity of the divine authority and indigenous laws rather than post-colonial recognition, it is important to note that the claim about the survival of sovereignty is a political claim made by the participants themselves. This does not weaken the finding; it shows *Imamanism* to be a living argument, actively maintained through generations.

In *Imamanist* discourse, political identity is not a matter of state recognition but historical structure. Moro rejects minority status and articulates Bangsamoro identity as rooted in the pre-colonial government system: Sultanate and Rajahnate experience, with Islam as its foundational basis and not merely a cultural dimension. Resistance and collective sacrifice are presented as identity-forming experiences whose meaning must be passed on to future generations. *Imamanism* is thus theorized as both a response to external historical erasure and a method of internally maintaining Moro political identity through shifting political circumstances. The findings also show that the sense of a single shared Bangsamoro identity is something the liberation movements worked hard to build. The Bangsamoro is made up of thirteen ethnolinguistic groups with their own different traditions. The unified identity expressed by participants is the result of deliberate political effort, not a natural fact that has always existed.

The articulation of Islamic polity in *Imamanism* is much more than the representation of Islam as a cultural marker. In all the groups of participants, Islam is depicted as a complete political and civilizational system. The principles of governance, i.e., Amanah, Shura, Adl and communal accountability, are the basic measures for the arrangement of authority and the evaluation of political leadership. This understanding morally elevates Islamic political authority over purely state-

based authority, not by rejecting modern institutions, but by providing a framework for their moral transformation and evaluation. It is claimed that what is to be restored by *Imamanism* is the revival of Islamic polity and that institutional politics is a constant threat to the Islamic moral foundations of the struggle. However, these organizations do not all understand Islamic governance in the same way. The 1977 split between the MILF and MNLF was partly about how central Islam should be to the political project, and that disagreement has not been fully resolved. What *Imamanism* provides is a shared language broad enough to hold these different understandings together—which is itself an important finding.

The political coherence and moral appeal of *Imamanism* is a function of its structural logic of historical continuity. The Moro struggle without historical continuity would be a current grievance. *Imamanism* in historical continuity is a sustained political argument that present aspirations are a continuation of historically legitimate claims. The historical account from the Sultanates and Rajahnate, to anti-colonial battles such as the Battle of Tampakan, Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak, to the Jabidah Massacre and Palembang Massacre, to the rise of the MNLF and MILF, to the governance arrangements of today, is not told as discrete historic episodes but as connected phases in an ongoing historic trajectory whose objectives are yet to be achieved. All fifteen participants are aware that the current political situation is still within the historical trajectory of the Bangsamoro struggle. The unfinished struggle is the most significant contemporary expression of this historical continuity.

One of the most analytically distinctive features of *Imamanist* discourse is the articulation of self-determination as a reclamation rather than as a new political demand. The framing of reclamation is based on three interconnected claims: first, that the Moro people were sovereign through the system of the Sultanate and the Rajahnate; second, that colonization interrupted the pre-existing condition without the Moro people's genuine consent; and third, that self-determination is an act of restoring what was disturbed, not creating something new. It is this framing that lends the Bangsamoro struggle its moral force and separates it from ordinary demands for autonomy, minority rights or inclusion in the Philippine state. Self-determination is truly the scope of political governance, cultural preservation,

Islamic identity, moral governance, and ancestral homeland. It is a broad vision of political restoration that autonomy arrangements cannot satisfy.

The notion of legitimacy-based authority in *Imamanism* fundamentally differs from the formal criteria of legitimacy in the modern state. The fifteen participants all describe political authority as legitimate only when it meets moral, historical, and Islamic criteria external to state-based recognition. The willingness to make sacrifices, to be sincere, and to truly commit oneself to the welfare of the Bangsamoro people will ensure the moral legitimacy that is always required before success in elections or legality can happen. The third legitimacy aspect involves proximity to the grassroots level. Politicians who maintain their closeness to the people are more legitimate than those who get too entangled with institutional politics. *Imamanism* is presented as a tool to fight illegitimacy and restore legitimacy.

Collectively, these findings provide a theoretical and empirical foundation of *Imamanism* as an ideology. It can help understand the Bangsamoro's interpretation of their historical and ongoing political struggle. However, this research has limitations. For instance, all my fifteen participants are experienced male senior leaders from three groups advocating for liberation. The opinions of women, youth, non-movement religious scholars, and accommodating Bangsamoro are not included in this study. A different set of voices might show different aspects of *Imamanism*, or challenge some of what this study found. It is a local intellectual tradition rooted in the historical, religious and cultural realities of the Bangsamoro people. Unlike existing frameworks, *Imamanism* does not assume that the Philippine state holds legitimate sovereignty over Bangsamoro territory. It studies the Moro struggle from inside Moro political vocabulary, not through borrowed Western categories.

The findings are valid for understanding how liberation movement leaders articulate *Imamanism*. However, it should not be read as a complete picture of Bangsamoro political thought, and a contribution to the larger project of pluralizing global political theory by offering a model of sovereignty that is enduring, moral and grounded in civilizational experience rather than Westphalian state frameworks.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are addressed to scholars, policymakers, Bangsamoro governance institutions, and the Moro liberation movements.

Future research on Bangsamoro studies should engage more systematically with the Moro as political thinkers and ideological actors, not as strategic negotiators or participants in conflict. Bangsamoro's political vocabulary includes ideas of unconquered sovereignty, Amanah (sacred trust), Shura (consultation), and historical continuity. It is rich in a tradition of intellectual thought that deserves serious theoretical consideration. There is encouragement for scholars to expand the empirical evidence of *Imamanism* through comparative studies with a broader range of Bangsamoro society, including women leaders, religious scholars (ulama), youth and leaders. This would help investigate how *Imamanist* consciousness manifests and is transmitted across different organizational and generational contexts.

This study also proves that the dominant analytical frameworks used in studying the Bangsamoro struggle, namely: minority rights, autonomy, insurgency, liberal peacebuilding are inadequate in explaining the ideological aspects of the Moro political experience. The conceptual overstretching that results from applying these frameworks from outside obscures rather than illuminates the historical legitimacy and political continuity that define the Bangsamoro struggle from within (Sartori, 1970). *Imamanism*, on the other hand, derives from and is rooted in the political language of the Moro themselves, and thus provides a more contextually informed and conceptually accurate account of Bangsamoro political thought.

Those involved in the Bangsamoro peace process and governance arrangements should understand that the Moro political struggle is not simply a matter of poverty, underdevelopment or minority grievance.

This requires moving beyond the transitional autonomy model and taking Moro aspirations seriously for genuine political agency, including control over ancestral lands and resources, preservation of Islamic identity, and the incorporation of Islamic governance principles, especially Shura and Amanah, into Bangsamoro governance structures. Moro leaders will continue to view policy frameworks

perceived to reduce the Bangsamoro's problems with deep scepticism, regardless of their administrative accomplishments.

Historical consciousness is thus an essential governance responsibility of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and its corresponding governing structures. From the findings of this research, it can be seen that the lack of historical awareness of the young generation of the Moro people regarding the Bangsamoro's historical significance is a common issue for all of the participants in the study. There should therefore be a rigorous effort from both national and regional organizations to create programs in historical education, oral history, and *Imamanist* narrative to preserve the language of politics of Moros.

The Moro liberation movement, the MILF, the MNLF Misuari Faction and the MNLF Sema Faction are encouraged to strategically invest in ideological education and the historical formation of the younger members and leaders. The findings show that *Imamanism* provides a critique of domination and a vision of political restoration. All the groups of participants considered that passing on the *Imamanism* to the next generations is a central duty of the leadership. Formal ideological formation programs, mentorship structures and intergenerational dialogue processes would enhance the continuity of the *Imamanist* consciousness across organisational generations.

In this study, *Imamanism* has been defined as an ideological construct at a certain historical moment or phase in the evolution of the Bangsamoro political struggle. As BARMM develops and the political context of the southern Philippines evolves, future research must examine how Islamist discourse responds to new political contexts, including the challenges and opportunities of participating in institutional governance, shifting generational leadership and the changing dynamics of the peace process.

The methodological approach of this research is thematic analysis, with purposive sampling. Future studies should be complemented by ethnographic fieldwork within Bangsamoro communities, the analysis of digital and social media expressions of *Imamanist* consciousness, and ongoing research on how historical consciousness is transmitted within families, community networks, and social communities.

Finally, this study demonstrates that the Bangsamoro struggle is best understood not as rebellion, insurgency or minority demand but as *Imamanism*—an ideological orientation that asserts the unbroken continuity of Bangsamoro sovereignty, the civilizational continuity of Moro political identity and the never-ending obligation to reclaim and sustain historical legitimacy rooted in pre-colonial sovereignty, Islamic governance and collective historical memory. Understanding the Moro as political thinkers who articulated a coherent, historically grounded ideology is not only analytically more accurate; it is also more historically grounded. It is a necessary condition for any peace process, governance arrangement, or scholarly engagement that aspires to be genuinely just.

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