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Construction and Constriction: Filipino/Moro binary in early republican English documents

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses the problem of how the Filipino/Moro binaries are represented within select English legal and constitutional documents and related subjective texts during the early Philippine Republican period. Specifically, it is structured to answer the research questions: a) What are the linguistic mechanisms employed in the Philippine early Republican governmental documents that marginalise Moros? and b) How do these documents perpetuate the Filipino/Moro binary? Data are extracted from English legal and constitutional documents from 1935 to 1975 from the government websites, including the Official Gazette of the Philippines (*officialgazette.gov.ph)* and the Supreme Court E-Library (*elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph*). Their source texts are objectified (Republic Acts) or subjective (Presidential Speeches). To analyse how these texts constructed and perpetuated marginalisation and oppositional binaries, Foucault's (1972) framework was employed. Its application here involves a genealogical examination of the archival corpus and selecting texts that explicitly reference the Moro population or their biopolitical and territorial governance. In the genealogical analysis, data are subjected to a coding process and thematic categorisation of the discursive practices. The study elucidates the persistent influence of these discursive formations on the Moros' pursuit of equitable representation within the nation-state's biopolitical framework. Consequently, the findings entail the necessity for a reconceptualisation of national identity that embraces the multiplicity and diversity of the archipelago's indigenous populations. This study is significant as it sheds light on the complex dynamics of power, knowledge, and identity construction, and their lasting effect on the contemporary political realities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Understanding these is fundamental to

achieving authentic and attainable peace in this volatile region.

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INTRODUCTION

This research investigates the linguistic phenomena embedded within early Philippine Republican governmental documents, focusing on the discursive mechanisms that construct and perpetuate the Filipino/Moro binary. The study employs Foucauldian (1972) discourse analysis from its genealogical strand to examine how these texts marginalise the Moro population through various discursive practices. By analysing the power/knowledge dynamics and genealogical tracing of historical and epistemic roots, the research aims to uncover the systematic marginalisation and subjugation of the Moro identity during the emergence of the Philippine nation-state.

The Bangsamoro region, with its rich and diverse cultures, stands as a testament to the archipelago's history before Spanish colonisation in 1564. Characterised by its Malay identities and Southeast Asian roots, this region maintains stronger cultural affinities with Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia than with the rest of the Philippines. This unique socio-political ecology is crucial for understanding Mindanao's ongoing struggle for self-determination, which has seen partial resolution in the political restructuring of the old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) into the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) – a transition that aims to end decades of armed conflict that have claimed thousands of lives and displaced millions (Lingga, 2004).

This study explores the complex dynamics of power, knowledge, and identity construction, and their lasting effects on the contemporary political realities of BARMM. Understanding these elements is fundamental to achieving authentic and attainable peace. While numerous studies have explored the sociocultural (Söderberg Kovacs et al., 2021), political (McKenna, 1998; Kapahi & Tañada, 2008), historiographical (Hawkins, 2008; Gowing, 1987), and economic (Lara, 2019) dimensions of the conflict, little attention has been paid to the epistemic dimension at the core of this identity and ideological conflict. Hawkins' historiographical exploration of Muslim integration (2008) delves into historical trends and national narratives that marginalise Moros through cultural and religious binaries, framing them as outsiders within the Filipino national identity. Similarly, Kapahi and Tañada (2008) emphasise the political and legislative obstacles in granting autonomy

to the Bangsamoro. McKenna (1998), in his ethnographic and historical account of Muslim separatism, examines the everyday politics and armed rebellion among the Moros but does not deeply explore the knowledge/power structures embedded in these dynamics. Additionally, works like Söderberg Kovacs et al. (2021) analyse post-conflict autonomy in the Bangsamoro region by focusing on the outcomes of the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). While these studies contribute to understanding the socio-political and economic aspects of the conflict, they overlook the historical discursive practices that have framed the Moro identity as "other" within the Filipino nation-state. These practices, rooted in colonial and post-colonial discourses, have perpetuated the marginalisation of the Moros and shaped their contested relationship with the state.

This study focuses on the critical dimension of epistemic violence, which refers to the systematic marginalisation and subjugation of the Moro identity through language and legal discourses. To address this issue, the research aims to examine how the identity of the Moros was epistemically constructed within the Philippine State during its formative years and through its most authoritative documents. Specifically, the study investigates how these constructions perpetuated marginalisation and exclusion, as guided by two primary research questions:

a) What linguistic mechanisms in early Philippine governmental documents marginalised Moros?
b) How did these documents perpetuate the Filipino/Moro binary?

The research analyses discursive themes and language patterns in English legal and constitutional documents from the early Philippine Republican period (1935–1965). These documents are critical to understanding how the state systematically categorised the Moro population as subordinate and reinforced their exclusion from constructing a unified national identity.

In particular, this study's objective is to examine how the predominantly Christian Filipino nation constructed its identity in opposition to the Muslim Moro tribes of the south. This analysis is framed within Foucauldian knowledge/power dynamics concepts, particularly state formation and institutional development. It investigates the central role of English, an elitist language introduced during the American colonial period, in consolidating state power and creating distance from local vernaculars. The deliberate use of English in legal and constitutional documents established knowledge-based power hierarchies and reinforced classification and control systems. As the state apparatus evolved, these legal texts systematically categorised populations, thereby normalising exclusionary practices that persist to this day (Foucault, 1972).

By deconstructing the linguistic mechanisms and discursive practices that have historically marginalised the Moros, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the epistemic roots of the conflict. It also aims to inform the development of inclusive policies that challenge entrenched hierarchies and promote equitable state-building. Through its focus on the epistemic dimension of the Filipino/Moro relationship, this research offers a critical lens for examining the intersection of language, power, and identity in post-colonial nation-building.

Albeit limited, researchers have explored the broader context of linguistic imperialism and its implications for marginalised communities in the Philippines. Gonzalez (1998), for instance, explores how English dominance in Philippine education marginalises local languages and cultures, while Tupas (2015) critiques English policies for perpetuating colonial hierarchies even after Independence, sustaining what Phillipson (2013) refers to as 'linguistic imperialism'.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), rooted in the works of Foucault (1972), has also been used extensively to interrogate manifestations of power dynamics and ideological constructs in the legal archive, facilitating governmentality. These works reveal how language is employed to construct and perpetuate hegemony by institutionalising social hierarchies and power relations. For instance, Martin (2018) employs CDA in revealing how courtroom language (particularly English) institutionalises linguistic hierarchies, further marginalising the less educated class whose command of the language is limited, if not non-existent. Gonzalez (2020), in a similar note, also examines the discursive strategies in immigration laws. He demonstrates how legal documents construct and sustain the notion of the 'other' for those society considers as alien. Subjective documents, such as presidential speeches, have also been subjects of critical interrogation. Zhu and Wang (2020), for example, analyse the speeches of the then-President of USA, Donald Trump and Wang Yi, the Director of the Chinese Communist Party. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, he explores how these leaders employ language to assert ideological dominance and a divisive feature of national identity in both countries. However, the methods they use are dissimilar.

In understanding the epistemic dimension of the Moro marginalisation, very few scholarly works were available. Fewer still is the application of Foucauldian (1972) methodology in exploring the nature of the question. This is particularly critical, considering the discursive formation that produces representations of Moros is still actively shaping national discourses and the state policies that emerge from them. Hernandez (2016), for instance, contextualises the Moro conflict through state policies that cycle

resistance and exclusion. Similarly, Gutierrez and Borras (2020) also dissect state policies in the territorialisation of Mindanao as a cause of the conflict. Land dispossession, ineffective management of policies as a deliberate strategy, and social exclusion are cited as the main causes of the obscurification of the Moro agency. Meanwhile, San Juan, Jr. (2006) critically interrogates the bourgeois political norms' façade of cultural pluralism and liberal tolerance, which only facilitated further historical dispossession and marginalisation of the Moros, rendering their struggle for self-determination ineffective. While these studies advance understanding of structural inequities, they often neglect the granular linguistic strategies in early Republican legal documents (1935–1975) that codified the Filipino/Moro binary. The nexus that essentially connects colonialisation, annexation, language, and marginalisation in the context of the Moro struggle has yet to be fully explored. This gap exhibits the urgency of interrogating how archival constitutional texts, through lexical choices, presuppositions, and intertextual echoes, naturalise exclusion, a lacuna this research addresses via Foucauldian genealogy to unravel the discursive roots of contemporary Bangsamoro conflicts.

The question regarding the nexus of coloniality and identity, and the marginalisation of annexed communities in the emergence of nation-states has long been the subject of researchers/activists. Olivier's (2019) work focuses on the South African experience using Fanon's resistance identity to examine how historical and contemporary power struggles shape decolonisation efforts. Here, education and cultural narratives are technologies used to either perpetuate or challenge the neocolonial power structures. In the work of Macdonald and Lopesi (2024), the epistemic resistance of the New Zealand and Pacific Islands is investigated. Their work emphasises the preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems in combating colonial narratives and challenging the postcolonial power dynamics. These studies demonstrate the widespread efforts to decolonise postcolonial societies to complete their liberation. It shows how valuable genealogical analysis, particularly that of Foucault (1972) in interrogating the significant remnants of colonialism that still discursively produce objects of marginalisation. In tracing the historical roots of the current discourses, the research work can uncover the deep-seated power relations that continue to shape identities and social structures.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilised a qualitative research design and unobtrusive textual analysis within the Critical Discourse tradition of Michel Foucault (2002). Foucault's theories on discursive formation and the institutionalisation of the

episteme serve as the primary analytical lenses. The focus is on how a postcolonial society, like the Philippines, interacts with groups that initially resisted their inclusion in the emerging state and their subsequent annexation. Additionally, the study investigates how the English language, particularly legal documents, perpetuates systems of subjugation.

Data Collection

The data for this research consists of English legal and constitutional documents produced during the formation of the Philippine Republic, specifically between November 15, 1935, and September 21, 1972. This period covers the Commonwealth era of Manuel L. Quezon and the Third Republic, a pivotal period, as it encompasses significant political and social transformations in the Philippines, including the establishment of foundational legal and constitutional frameworks. This era marks the transition from American colonial rule to an independent republic, providing a rich corpus of documents reflecting the evolving national identity and governance discourse. More importantly, this period included the annexation of Mindanao.

After meticulously gathering relevant Republic Acts and presidential speeches, they were organised genealogically to form an epistemic archive. The primary focus was on documents that explicitly addressed the Moro population. Out of the numerous texts, the final selection includes Republic Act No. 1888 (1957), Commonwealth Act No. 491 (1930), and speeches by Presidents Manuel L. Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, Manuel Roxas, and Elpidio Quirino. The texts were selected from government websites such as (a) the Official Gazette of the Philippines (officialgazette.gov.ph) and (b) the Supreme Court E-Library (elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph). The search was thorough, but only those documents that explicitly mentioned Moros or their traditional territories were selected for analysis. This collection allowed for a historical tracing of discursive practices and their evolution over time. The data is categorised into two types:

- **Objectified Data:** This includes Republic Acts that explicitly mention the Moro population or its variations (e.g., Non-Christian, Mohammedan, Muslims).
- **Subjective Data:** This includes speeches delivered in English by Philippine Presidents on various occasions. These speeches were initially sourced from various collections but are also available on a government website that serves as an archive of Presidential Speeches.

Data Analysis

The methodology for this research was designed to systematically analyse the data and uncover the underlying discursive mechanisms.

Critical discourse analysis in the tradition of Foucault (1972), was employed as a comprehensive and systematic approach in the data analysis. It is structured into five distinct steps. First, each document was closely read, focusing on linguistic construction, examining lexical choices, syntactic structures, and rhetorical strategies. Next, relevant passages about the representation of the Moro population were identified by pinpointing specific sections where Moro identity and issues were discussed or implied. Following this, statements about Moro identity positioning were systematically coded and categorised. From this, a coding scheme was created to classify different types of discursive practices and themes. The power structures and identity constructions embedded within the texts were then examined using critical discourse analysis. The data were analysed in terms of how they construct social identities, reinforce power hierarchies, and perpetuate marginalisation. Finally, the findings from the analysis were compiled and thematically organised, with supporting extracts from the texts illustrating the identified themes and discursive practices. This thematic organisation helped synthesize the data and draw meaningful conclusions about the discursive construction of Moro identity. In following these steps, the research uncovered the systematic marginalisation and subjugation of the Moro population through legal and political discourses.

Analytical Framework

Foucault's (1972) genealogical method was prominently used in the analysis. This method retraces widely accepted ideas and terminologies from power dynamics and historical realities. This unique context produced a phenomenon akin to Spivak's (1988) Neo-Colonialism, or the tendency of postcolonial societies to imitate the hegemonic system used to colonise them. The Bangsamoro case is distinctively different, however, as the postcolonial state in question, i.e., the Philippines, has colonised through political annexation states that have survived colonialisation.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards by ensuring the unobtrusive nature of the textual analysis, respecting the integrity of the documents analysed, and maintaining objectivity in the interpretation of data.

RESULTS

The analysis involves sifting through governmental documents from the early Philippine Republican Era. After a thorough analysis, the following discursive themes emerged.

Discursive Marginalization

Legal texts institutionalised hierarchies through lexical choices that framed Moros as "uncivilised" or in need of state intervention, are found in the following texts:

- **Commonwealth Act No. 491 (1930)** categorised Moros as "non-Christian tribes" and conditioned their rights on being "sufficiently advanced in civilisation" (Republic of the Philippines, 1930). This terminology positioned Moro cultural practices as inferior and justified state oversight.
- **Republic Act No. 1888 (1957)** mandated the "economic, social, moral, and political advancement" of "non-Christian Filipinos" (Republic of the Philippines, 1957). The emphasis on "integration" implicitly pathologised Moro identity. This frames assimilation as necessary for progress.

These laws weaponized institutional discourse to naturalize exclusionary policies, which reflects Foucault's (1972) concept of power/knowledge dynamics.

Table 1. Discursive Marginalisation

Discursive Theme	Documents/ Artefacts	Mode of enunciation	Linguistic Strategy	Impact on Moro Identity
Marginalisation	Commonwealth Act. No. 491 (1930) or *An Act to Amend Certain Sections Of Act Numbered Twenty-Five Hundred And Ninety, Entitled "An Act For We Protection Of Game And Fish"*	Institutional Discourse	Terms: "non-Christian tribes," "sufficiently advanced in civilization"	Framed Moro practices as inferior; denied cultural autonomy.
	Republic Act No. 1888 (1957), or *Act to Effectuate in a More Rapid and Complete Manner the*	Institutional Discourse	Terms: "economic, social, moral advancement	Legitimised assimilation; erased epistemic and

Economic, Social, Moral, and Political Advancement of the Non-Christian Filipinos or National Cultural Minorities	," "integration"		cultural systems.

As Table 1 demonstrates, Philippine laws like RA 1888 and Commonwealth Act No. 491 weaponised institutional discourse to marginalise Moro communities. By framing Moros as 'uncivilised' or in need of 'advancement.' Texts of this kind legitimised assimilationist policies rooted in coloniality (Lorenzini, 2023)

Illocutionary Othering and Discursive Exonymisation

Strategies found in the text through pronominal designation, revealing othering through deixis, are termed here as Illocutionary Othering. This is a kind of othering that utilises deixis to establish exclusion. Likewise, the means to refer to the Moro using lexical redesignation is termed 'exonymisation.' The term itself pertains to the designation of names by outsiders, instead of adopting their local nomenclature. Both are subtle forms of othering using basic linguistic elements. Pronominal deixis and lexical redesignation in presidential speeches reinforced exclusionary binaries are found in:

- Quezon's 1936 Camp Keithley Speech employed "you" to address Moros, contrasting with "our laws" (Christian Filipinos), which positioned Moros as governed subjects (Quezon, 1936). Conditional clauses like "if they violate our laws" further entrenched an "us vs. them" dichotomy. The term "Mohammedans" (vs. "Muslims") imposed colonial-era terminology that erases self-identification and enables Orientalist frameworks (Said, 2002).

These strategies, illustrated below, exemplify how language functioned as a tool of epistemic erasure (Lorenzini, 2023).

Table 2. Illocutionary Othering and Discursive Exonymisation

Discursive Theme	Documents/ Artefacts	Mode of enunciation	Linguistic Strategy	Impact on Moro Identity
Illocutionary Othering	Speech by President Manuel L. Quezon at Camp Keithley, Lanao (June 6, 1936)	Subjective Discourse	Pronominal "*you*" (Moro audience)	Erasure of agency; positions Moros as passive subjects governed by Christian Filipinos.
			Conditional "*if they violate our laws*"	Reinforces "us vs. them" binary, frames Moro

		adherence to state laws as conditional inclusion.
Discursive Exonymisation	Use of "*Mohammedans* " vs "*Muslims*"	Epistemic erasure imposes Christian-colonial terminology, denying self-identification.

As Table 2 illustrates, Quezon's speech deployed linguistic strategies to subordinate Moro identity. Illocutionary othering ('you'/ 'they/our') and exonymization ('Mohammedans') reflect the Philippine state's internalisation of colonial logics, where language becomes a tool of erasure (Said, 2002).

Discursive Securitization

The concept of securitisation, introduced by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, frames certain societal elements as existential threats to state stability, thus justifying extraordinary measures, even those that might breach ethical or legal norms (Buzan et al., 1998). This discourse has prominently shaped governance strategies during the Marcos Dictatorship, the Erap Administration, and the post-9/11 period. However, its origins can be traced back to the early days of the Philippine Republic, where it was employed to marginalise and control the Moro population.

State actors framed Moros as existential threats to legitimise militarisation in the following texts:

- **Quezon's 1936 National Assembly Speech** depicted Lanao as "*lawless,*" citing a "*notorious bandit*" to justify military intervention (Quezon, 1936).
- **Roxas's 1946 State of the Nation Address** characterised Moros as "*heavily armed*" and "*dangerous,*" valorising state-led disarmament as a marker of "*normalcy*" (Roxas, 1946).

Such narratives, mirroring colonial binaries of "*civilised vs. savage*" (Buzan et al., 1998), normalise state control over Moro territories.

Table 3. Discursive Securitisation

Discursive Theme	Documents/ Artefacts	Mode of enunciation	Linguistic Strategy	Impact on Moro Identity

Securitisation	Quezon's Speech to the First National Assembly (1936)	Subjective Discourse	Framing Moro territories as "lawless"	Erasure of Moro autonomy; justification for militarisation and legislative control.
	Roxas's State of the Nation Address (1946)	Subjective Discourse	Portraying Moros as "heavily armed, dangerous"	Reinforcement of stereotypes, legitimised disarmament and forced submission to state authority.

Table 3 demonstrates how securitisation discourse enabled the Philippine state to justify militarisation and legal coercion in Moro territories. Moros are framed as inherently violent (Quezon) or backward (Roxas) to perpetuate narratives of colonial binaries of 'civilised' vs. 'savage'. This aligns with global patterns where securitisation serves as a tool of erasure (Buchan & Heath, 2006; Sen, 2017).

Discursive Terra Nullius

Colonialization is a discursive construct that can easily be replicated with its practices. Discursive themes are used to justify a colonial action, especially enacted in the territory. The most popular of these is the act of separating people's connections from their land. The legal term used to describe this is "terra nullius." This Latin expression, originating in Roman Law, is broadly understood as "no one's land," or land that is empty, backwards, or underdeveloped and therefore justifiably colonisable (Sen, 2017). In the emergence of the modern nation-state, this was almost always the logic for settler-colonialization. Not surprisingly, this was used in Palestine (Svirsky, 2010), Australia (Buchan & Heath, 2006), and the Andaman Islands (Ramnath, 2024), among many others.

This discourse, where Mindanao was discursively constructed as "*empty*" or "*public land*" to enable settler-colonial projects, was present in the following texts:

- **Quezon's 1939 Speech on Jewish Settlement** described Mindanao as "*sparsely populated*" and "*fertile, untouched*" (Quezon, 1939), erasing Indigenous presence.
- **Commonwealth Act No. 491 (1930)** legalized land appropriation, codifying state ownership over ancestral territories (Republic of the Philippines, 1930).

This dual strategy—rhetorical erasure and legal codification—mirrored global colonial practices (Sen, 2017).

Table 4. Discursive Terra Nullius

Discursive Theme	Documents/ Artefacts	Mode of enunciation	Linguistic Strategy	Impact on Moro Identity
Discursive Terra Nullius	Speech by President Manuel L. Quezon on the proposed Jewish settlement in Mindanao (1939)	Subjective Discourse	Framing Mindanao as "sparsely populated"	Erasure of Moro presence; legitimised settler-colonial claims to land.
	Speech by President Manuel L. Quezon to the First National Assembly (June 16, 1936)	Subjective Discourse	Describing Mindanao as "fertile, untouched"	Naturalised displacement of Indigenous communities by portraying land as "empty" and available.
	Commonwealth Act No. 491 (1930)	Objectified Discourse	Legalising public land appropriation	Codified state control over Moro territories, ignoring preexisting sovereignty and occupation.
	Republic Act No. 1888 (1957)	Objectified Discourse	Framing annexation as "benevolent integration"	Legitimised state annexation by masking colonial violence under narratives of "development."

As Table 4 illustrates, both subjective and institutional discourses of terra nullius were deployed in the Philippines to justify colonial practices. Quezon's speeches framed Mindanao as 'empty,' while laws like Commonwealth Act No. 491. legally enacted this erasure. This dual strategy mirrors global colonial patterns (Sen, 2017), where terra nullius legitimises displacement through rhetorical and bureaucratic means.

Filipino/Moro Binary

The cumulative effect of these discourses is synthesised in **Table 5**, which contrasts the constructed identities:

Table 5. Filipino/Moro Binary Representations

Discursive Theme	Filipino	Moros
Marginalisation	Extension of Western civilisation through colonialisation; Standard of civilisation and progressive	Resisted colonialisation; regressive; Needs to sufficiently advance in civilisation
	Seen as the norm	Needs to be integrated into the 'norm'
Illocutionary Othering	Positioned as the governing authority, "our laws" imply ownership and control	Pronominal "you" (Moro audience); Conditional "if they violate our laws"
Discursive Exonymisation	Referred to as Christians	'Non-Christians' Or 'Mohammedans'
Securitisation	Implementer of the law, provider of security	Lawless, heavily armed, and dangerous
Discursive Terra Nullius	Entitled to "underdeveloped land	Does not exist in their land

This table shows how the Filipino identity has been redefined and valorised through the discursive othering of the Moros. This serves as justification for the power relations between the two and the institutionalisation of the marginalisation as a benevolent act.

These findings illustrate how linguistic and institutional practices systematically marginalized Moros. The subsequent discussion will interpret these results through Foucauldian and postcolonial lenses.

DISCUSSION

Foucault sees discourse as structured statements, ideas, attitudes, and practices. These discourses manifest in various forms, from formal legislative documents like Republic Acts to informal social media interactions, all participating in the systematic construction and governance of their subjects (Guttig, 2005). They are not merely combinations of words but are also the governing linguistic rules on how the object is discussed, constructed, limited, and understood (Mills, 2003). By closely analysing various documents produced in the episteme of the Philippines, patterns would emerge that reveal the formation of the object "Moro."

The term "Moro" originally encompassed diverse Muslim tribes with distinct autonomous governments in the southern island of Mindanao, the second largest island in what is now referred to as the Philippines. During the American colonial period, these groups were administratively unified under

the Department of Mindanao and Sulu (Abinales, 2000). The Spanish colonial powers, before that occupation, were the first to employ the term "Moro" as a collective designation for the Muslim natives they encountered in the Northern Islands. These people reminded them of the Moriscos who used to rule them, so the name strategically framed these groups as state adversaries (Majul, 1976). Following American withdrawal and the establishment of the Philippine government, these territories were incorporated into the national framework without significant consultation or consent from the affected populations. This annexation was facilitated by a discursive framework that positioned the Moro populations as requiring external governance, justified through institutional and documentary linguistic practices that constructed them as culturally inferior.

The results of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of how early Philippine Republican legal documents and presidential speeches systematically marginalised the Moro population through various discursive mechanisms. Examining these texts through a Foucauldian lens uncovered the intricate ways in which language and power intersect to construct and perpetuate the Filipino/Moro binary. This section will delve into interpreting the identified discursive themes—marginalisation, illocutionary othering, exonymisation, securitisation, and terra nullius. It specifically focuses on constructing national identity and the persistent influence of colonial and postcolonial discourses in shaping governance and social dynamics in the Bangsamoro region.

Discursive Marginalization

Republic Act No. 1888 (1957), also known as the *Act to Effectuate in a More Rapid and Complete Manner the Economic, Social, Moral, and Political Advancement of the Non-Christian Filipinos or National Cultural Minorities*, framed the Moros as economically, socially, and politically inferior and sought their integration into the "body politic." This integration was premised on the dissolution of the unique epistemic and cultural systems of Moro communities in favour of assimilation into the dominant national identity.

Similarly, an earlier text, **the Commonwealth Act. No. 491 (1930**) or *An Act to Amend Certain Sections of Act Numbered Twenty-Five Hundred And Ninety, Entitled "An Act For We Protection Of Game And Fish"* sustains similar discursive representation. Section 16 of this is the most concerning. It presents the Muslims (belonging to the non-Christian tribes mentioned in the original text) as less advanced in civilisation, and the prohibition only applies to them if they have sufficiently advanced in civilisation. (Republic of the Philippines, 1930)."

These legislative texts often employed linguistic markers, such as "moral advancement" and "economic development," that implicitly framed

the Moro population as a deviant group requiring state intervention correction. Such terminology reinforced the perception that Moro communities were outside the normative bounds of the national identity. This only shows how state-produced texts during the early Republican period systematically marginalised the Moro population through discursive mechanisms. Republic Act No. 1888, for example, exemplifies Foucault's (1972) concept of power/knowledge dynamics, where language is used to construct social identities and hierarchies. The Moro people are framed as economically and socially deficient; therefore, the law justified their assimilation into the dominant Filipino culture. This presupposes the erasure of their distinct identity as necessary for progress, which reflects what Said (2002) identifies as Orientalist practices, where the "Other" is systematically portrayed as inferior to the dominant group.

Commonwealth Act No. 491 further illustrates biopolitical governance, as described by Foucault (1972), wherein the state exerted control over Moro populations by defining their cultural practices as backward and subjecting them to regulatory frameworks (Gutting, 2005). Additionally, the requirement for certification of "civilizational advancement" draws attention to the state's role as an arbiter of cultural legitimacy, while simultaneously denying the Indigenous practices and belief systems. Both texts employ linguistic strategies to normalise exclusionary practices and perpetuate epistemic violence. The terms "non-Christian tribes" and "advancement" signify a linguistic move to categorise the Moros as a problem to be managed, rather than as equal participants in the nation-building process, or a necessary component of a diverse national identity. As Lorenzini (2023) argues, such practices reflect the broader coloniality embedded in post-colonial governance, where historical power structures are reproduced through institutional discourse. By positioning the Moros as requiring "correction" or "integration," these documents perpetuated a binary between the dominant Filipino identity and the marginalised Moro identity. This binary is rooted in the colonial legacy of the Spanish and American regimes, which employed similar linguistic and legal strategies to subordinate indigenous populations. Such frameworks continue to influence contemporary policies in the Bangsamoro region.

Illocutionary Othering

The analysis of President Manuel L. Quezon's speech at Camp Keithley, Lanao, on June 6, 1936, reveals subtle yet powerful illocutionary othering and discursive exonymization mechanisms. Central to the understanding of this document or artefact is its enunciative location. Delivered in the heart of Moro territory to an audience composed of Christian settlers and the local

indigenous Muslims, Quezon's speech exemplifies the strategic use of language to assert authority and marginalise the Moro identity.

By adopting a tone of inclusion, Quezon creates an illusion of unity, stating that "Moros and Christians constitute one people." However, this inclusivity is discursively weaponised to justify the settler-colonial agenda. When equal rights are framed within an environment of settler-colonialism, where Indigenous peoples whose territories are illegally annexed are not given special considerations and protections over their rights, equality becomes a legitimising tool for displacement and marginalisation. This marginalisation has been significantly revealed through pronominal designations in the speech, particularly the shift between the speaker's positionality (and what he represents) and the audience, which he repeatedly referred to as "you" in the statements:

> You, the Mohammedans, and you, the Christians, constitute one people, and over you preside a Chief Executive and a National Assembly elected by you, and you alone (Quezon, 1936).

With this, power dynamics position the government and Christian Filipinos as authoritative, while the Moros are relegated to the role of the governed, captured precisely with his line "…no more of that nonsense that Christian Filipinos cannot govern their non-Christian brothers".

The power dynamics were further emphasised when Quezon stated that a Chief Executive and a National Assembly elected by the people presided over them. The phrase "over you" highlighted the deictic relationship, with the government's authority looming above the Moros. This position was reorganised around the concept of biopower, where power emanated from the "you" ("elected by you, and you alone"). The exclusion was intensified in Quezon's assurance that Mohammedan Filipinos would receive the same consideration, protection, and treatment as Christian Filipinos. The conditional "if they violate our laws" subtly othered the Moros by implying a distinction between "our laws" (those of the Christian Filipinos or the state) and the Moros who must adhere to them. The "they" in this statement reveals the discursive theme of illocutionary othering in a speech constructed to communicate fairness, justice, and equality. As Lorenzini (2023) notes, such discursive moves emphasise the state's biopolitical control over marginalised groups. These frame governance as emanating from the people ("elected by you") while effectively dissolving Moro's agency within the larger political structure.

Discursive Exonymisation

In the same speech, Quezon used the term Mohammedan when referring to the indigenous Muslim inhabitants of Lanao. The use of "Mohammedans" instead of "Muslims" demonstrates what Said (2002) identifies as the use of Eurocentric terminologies to control the Orient

epistemically. In this work, it is referred to as exonymisation, a linguistic practice that erases Indigenous identities and imposes external definitions. This view is sustained by Saeed (2006) and Daniel (1960) because it falsely implies that Muslims worship Muhammad rather than Allah, comparable to how Christians' worship Christ. It was also primarily used by Western scholars during the colonial period who viewed Islam through a Christian-centric lens, where Western religious categorisation is imposed upon distinct faith traditions (Hourani, 1991). The term was rejected by Muslim scholars and communities, who emphasise that Islam means "submission to God," not devotion to Muhammad (Armstrong, 2002).

By adopting this terminology, Quezon reinforces epistemic colonialism. The term in fact is taken from works of American orientalists, which shows the Philippine state's internalisation of colonial practices to control and redefine the Moro identity. In the statement "Mohammedan Filipinos will receive the same consideration, the same protection, the same treatments as the Christian Filipinos", Quezon revealed the conditional nature of inclusion. The imposition of Christian-majority laws on a distinct cultural and religious group illustrates the state's failure to recognise the Moros' unique identity. Ultimately, Quezon's speech reflects the coloniality embedded in the Philippine state's governance. Through illocutionary othering and exonymisation, marginalisation has been perpetuated. These discursive strategies entrench power imbalances and reinforce systemic inequities that continue to shape the socio-political landscape of the Bangsamoro region.

Discursive Securitization

In his message to the First National Assembly on June 16, 1936, President Manuel L. Quezon discussed a "notorious bandit" in Lanao, a Moro territory predominantly inhabited by the Maranao ethnic group. Quezon remarked that the role of the Constabulary is to restore peace and order in the place (Quezon, 1936).

Similarly, **President Manuel Roxas**, in his **State of the Nation Address on January 26, 1946**, drew attention to the widespread illegal possession of arms in Lanao, and claimed that the control over the area incidentally resulted to "normalcy" (Roxas, 1946).

The discursive securitisation displays how state actors leveraged discourse to construct the Moros, with a tendency to violence and as a threat to national stability. Buzan et al. (1998) argue that securitisation involves framing societal elements as existential dangers to justify extraordinary interventions. In this case, Moros were depicted as inherently violent, and they were portrayed only in these tones in the national speeches.

Quezon's depiction of Lanao as terrorised by a single bandit also aligns with this discourse. His framing of the Moro territory as lawless and chaotic

justified the need for preventive measures, which are not limited to military intervention and legislative action. Furthermore, statements like these serve as the starting point of a discursive formation that portrays Moros as incapable of self-governance. Such a strategy is known to be used by colonialists to justify colonisation, and it laid the groundwork for future cycles of repression, resistance, and violence that solidified the perception of Moros as perennial threats to the nation.

Roxas's focus on the widespread surrender of arms in Lanao only entrenched this narrative. Here, Roxas constructed the Moros as a heavily armed and dangerous group with a backward mentality. Furthermore, his ability to force their datu, or traditional leader, to surrender their arms is an accomplishment that warrants national attention.

Additionally, the Moro territory was depicted as a "Wild West" within the nation, where crimes like cattle theft and indentured labour marked it as a space of deviation from the national norm. These remarks reflect what Lorenzini (2023) describes as biopolitical governance, where the state assumes the role of regulating and defining the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Here, Roxas positioned the government as the sole arbiter of progress and civilisation by underlining state-led measures to terminate practices like cattle theft and slavery, still practised by what is viewed as a morally underdeveloped group.

Both speeches illustrate how securitisation discourses were tools for justifying state interventions in the Moro territories. These interventions often involved militarisation and the imposition of laws that disregarded the cultural and historical contexts of the region. The framing of Moros as inherently violent and in need of external control reflects a broader colonial legacy where governance is predicated on the systematic marginalisation of Indigenous populations. By constructing the Moro identity through securitisation, state actors not only justified extraordinary actions but also perpetuated a binary between the "civilised" state and the "violent" Moro.

Discursive Terra Nullius

On February 15, 1939, the president of the Commonwealth, Manuel L. Quezon, released the following statement regarding the proposed Jewish Settlement in Mindanao.

> Sometime ago, representations were made… proposing the settlement of several thousand refugees and their families in Mindanao or other sparsely populated areas in the Philippines… these refugees… would be assisted by competent personnel to plan and direct the development of the land (Quezon, 1939).

This discourse reveals the state's attitude that has then discursively positioned itself as the proprietor of the Island, with its entirety, at its

complete disposal. In this statement, the government classified Mindanao as "sparsely populated", ready to be sliced into communities that could even accommodate foreigners from Europe. Mindanao was dubbed the Land of Promise, and Agrarian reform was established to benefit the settlers from Luzon and Visayas, displacing and marginalising the Moros in their own sultanates, phanganpongs, and Kingdoms. This project has often been accompanied by violence by armed settlers who were effectively protected by the Philippine army (Abaya-Ulindang, 2015; Hawkins, 2008; McKenna, 1998).

Similarly, in his message to the First National Assembly regarding the Country's conditions and problems on June 16, 1923, Pres. Quezon made the following statement that sustained his use of Terra Nullius discourse about the territory of the Moros:

> to acquire these particular areas at the expense of the people when there is so much available, fertile, and untouched public land… particularly in Mindanao (Quezon, 1923).

The use of the term Public Land has its history in the Early American Colonial period, which declared the territories of the Moros as public, therefore government-owned, despite them being actively governed, utilised, and inhabited by Indigenous people (Majul, 1976). Here, Pres. Quezon has denied their agency over their private and ancestral lands. He treated the entirety of Mindanao as a property he could bequeath easily. He does not acknowledge the Moros as part of 'our people' and went as far as to entice the people in the northern parts of the Philippines to move out from their places of birth to settle in other provinces or islands. In a single speech, he referred to certain parts of Mindanao as "uninhabited but rich" and an "unoccupied area of the island." This discourse is sustained on the discussion regarding the construction of roads as a move to 'develop' Mindanao and facilitate settlement in what is again seen as 'immense unoccupied areas.' This act is seen purely in its "incalculable value to the country"(Quezon, 1936) but has completely disregarded the cultural and historical significance of this land to its current and Indigenous population. The text also features the concept named in this research as "deterritorialisation", which is defined here as the process used by the nation-state to redefine not just the territorial boundary, but the cultural spirit of the place. It is accomplished through the reorganisation of the space through its population by constructing physical infrastructure (i.e., the roads in Mindanao). This diffuses and reconfigures the territory, spiriting away its indigeneity and history, and further includes the redefinition of land ownership and land use.

Terra nullius discourse over Mindanao was consistently repeated to establish the regime of truth and give justification for the colonial-settler project that would later plague the region into constant wars. The Moro nations were now being destabilised in these discourses as the territory

"Mindanao" and the people "Moro" were increasingly isolated. The new nation-states understood that the new power is distributed to the individual. Therefore, human settlements are the most effective way to dismantle indigenous sovereignty in the territory (Morgensen, 2011).

The themes used in marginalising the Moros in governmental discourse facilitate the formation of the object "Moro" and how it would be discussed, positioned, or treated. The further intensification of this object representation results in discursive saturation until it becomes the only legitimate way to represent the Moros linguistically.

Filipino/Moro Binary Construction

The phenomenon of a colonised group inheriting the disposition of its previous coloniser is not unique to the Philippines. Spivak (2020) refers to this tendency as neo-colonialism. Freire (2005) similarly describes how the oppressed, failing to liberate themselves entirely, often become new oppressors. As Spivak puts it, this continuity of power structures is maintained through laws and governmental discourses that are wielded, "much like a cannon in the artillery of the empire." These mechanisms, masquerading under the guise of democracy and progress, make domination appear consensual, a concept explored by Gramsci (2011) as the "manufacture of consent" (Chomsky, 2003).

In its efforts to unify a diverse archipelago, the Philippine nation-state has sought a cohesive national identity capable of integrating its multi-ethnic populations. However, the construction of this identity has been heavily influenced by the frameworks of its colonisers. The question of "What makes a Filipino Filipino?" initiated a process of "patchworking" a national identity (Mulder, 2013). The Northern elite absorbed and reshaped the cultural markers of other tribes to suit their vision of Filipino identity. As a result, symbols of Filipino culture, such as the national language, dress, and even the national hero, were patterned after Northern traditions (Tusalem, 2019). Textbooks featured images of fiestas, lechons, and old Spanish churches, constructing a predominantly Christian and Americanized image of "Filipino-ness." Even the Philippine flag reflects this colonial legacy with its distinctly American-influenced design.

In stark contrast to this constructed national identity, the "Moro" identity stood in defiance, rooted in centuries of resistance and pride in its role as the vanguard of Islam in the region. Hawkins (2008) explains that the conflict in Mindanao arises from the Filipino nation's cognitive exercise of creating itself. Despite its multi-ethnic nature, this identity-forming process ironically produced internal conflicts (Neumann, 2010). The Moro identity, deeply defined by its art, history, and traditions (Kapahi & Tñada, 2008), emerged as a counterpoint to the Filipino identity. The Philippine

government, grappling with its unresolved definition of "Filipino," appropriated Mindanao by constructing it as terra nullius—a discursive erasure of its Indigenous sovereignty—and framed the Moro identity as non-standard and backward.

A speech by President Manuel L. Quezon on January 11, 1936, celebrating Spain's contributions to Filipino culture, encapsulates this colonial inheritance.

> If Spain had done nothing in the Philippines but wielding scattered and separate elements into… our nationality… it would be sufficient, despite the mistakes which.. were 'crimes of the times and not of Spain (Quezon, 1936).

Quezon's speech positions colonialism not as an antagonist to nation-building but as its central pillar. Spain is credited with unifying the archipelago's disparate tribes into a singular political entity, a foundation upon which American colonial influence further developed the Filipino identity. This narrative casts colonisation as a benevolent force. It considers Spain and America as architects of Filipino civilisation and national identity. Such valorisation disregards the Indigenous creativity and agency that existed prior to colonisation. Instead, pre-colonial histories and cultures are minimised, relegated to the margins of the national story.

By celebrating the colonial past, Quezon linguistically displaces the brutality of colonialism. Spain's exploitative practices are reframed as "crimes of the times," absolving the coloniser of responsibility and embedding a narrative of gratitude within the Filipino episteme. This gratitude extends to the United States, whose colonial contributions are seen as a natural progression from Spain's groundwork.:

> which has not only enabled us to assimilate another civilization such (…) the United States of America, but has also prevented the basic and distinctive elements of our personality from being carried away by strange currents (Quezon, 1936).

Such narratives normalise the adoption of colonial discourses by the Filipino elite, who then applied these same frameworks to Mindanao and its Moro inhabitants. The "Moro" identity, defined by its resistance to Spanish colonisation, is effectively excluded from this national identity narrative. Instead, the Moro people are framed as obstacles to progress, and their sovereignty is dismissed through the terra nullius discourse. This binary construction—where the "Filipino" is aligned with Christianized, Americanized modernity and the "Moro" with backwardness—reinforces the colonial logic of othering.

Quezon's acknowledgement of Spain's role as the unifier of the Philippine nation highlights the extent to which colonial influences have shaped the country's identity. However, this framing also reveals an

inferiority complex on a national scale. By attributing the "soil's fertility (Quezon, 1936)" to colonial intervention, the Filipino identity is dependent on external forces. Consequently, the nation struggles to define itself outside its colonial past, perpetuating the binaries and conflicts that colonialism introduced. This failure to articulate a post-colonial identity sharpens the divide between the "Filipino" and the "Moro," sustaining systemic marginalisation and conflict.

The entwined forces of Colonialism, Christianity, and Civilisation have not only shaped the Filipino national identity but have also created a discursive chasm, positioning the Moro as the diametric 'Other.' Within the prevailing discourse, the Moros are depicted as "abnormal" and "backward." This marginalisation is further exacerbated by the narrative of securitisation, which frames the Moro as a perpetual "threat" to the state's order and harmony. The use of illocutionary othering by the state's apparatus serves to cast the Moro as perpetual "outsiders," estranged from the national narrative and its promises.

The colonial discourse, once an external imposition by foreign powers, has been indigenously reappropriated and repurposed to serve the interests of the emergent Philippine state. It is a discourse that has not merely lingered but has been actively maintained and adapted to underpin the state's hegemony. As Jubair (1999) poignantly observes, if the Filipino is the child of colonialism, the Moro is the child of anti-colonialism, a testament to a history of resistance and a refusal to acquiesce to the colonial and post-colonial reconfigurations of power. The Moro, therefore, embody a narrative of defiance, asserting their distinct place and role in the historical and contemporary tapestry of the Philippines, challenging the very structures that seek to define and contain them.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the intricate ways in which legal documents and presidential speeches from the early Philippine Republican period have systematically marginalised the Moro population through various discursive mechanisms. The analysis uncovered patterns of discursive marginalisation, illocutionary othering, discursive exonymization, securitisation, and terra nullius, all of which contributed to constructing the Moro identity as subordinate and threatening to the emerging Filipino nation-state. These findings highlight the persistent influence of colonial and postcolonial discourses in shaping national identity and governance.

The research demonstrated that legal texts and presidential speeches employed specific linguistic strategies to reinforce power hierarchies and perpetuate the Filipino/Moro binary. By framing Moros as economically, socially, and politically inferior, and their territories as empty and available

for settlement, these documents justified state interventions and the othering of the Moro population. The use of external terms and pronominal designations further entrenched the perception of Moros as outsiders, legitimising their exclusion from the national narrative.

One limitation of this study is the reliance on a specific set of documents from the early Republican period, which may not capture the full spectrum of discursive practices across different eras. Additionally, the focus on English-language texts may overlook the nuances present in documents written in other languages. These limitations exist partly because this research represents a new and exploratory study into the discursive construction of Moro identity. While the genealogical approach provides a thorough historical tracing, it is constrained by the availability and accessibility of historical texts. However, the paper addresses these limitations by providing a detailed analysis of the selected texts and suggesting the need for further exploration.

Future research could expand the scope by including a broader range of documents from different periods and languages to provide a more comprehensive understanding of discursive practices. Researchers could also explore the impact of these discourses on contemporary policies and social dynamics in the Bangsamoro region. Comparative studies with other neocolonial contexts could offer valuable insights into discursive marginalization's universal and unique aspects. Finally, incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, such as combining CDA with ethnographic methods, could enrich the analysis and provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of marginalised communities.

By addressing these suggestions, future research can continue unraveling the complex dynamics of power, knowledge, and identity construction, contributing to developing more inclusive and equitable policies and practices in the Bangsamoro region.

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