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# Social memory and state–civil society relations in the Philippines: Forgetting and remembering the Jabidah ‘massacre’

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## Abstract

This article seeks to explain the recent resurgence in national memories of the Jabidah Massacre – the killing of dozens of Muslim recruits undergoing clandestine training, allegedly in preparation for the infiltration and destabilization of Sabah. We argue that the ways in which the memories of this incident have been forgotten, remembered and appropriated by different groups in the past four decades were determined by the shifting political needs and interests of elite politicians, Moro nationalists and civil society groups.

## Keywords

Philippines, massacre, Moro, civil society, memory

In the early hours of 18 March 1968, dozens of Muslim recruits who were undergoing clandestine commando training on Corregidor Island in the Philippines, reportedly in preparation for the infiltration and destabilization of Sabah, were summarily executed by their military trainers. Although the circumstances that led to the killings were never fully verified despite a

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number of investigations, news and rumours about what came to be known as the Jabidah Massacre<sup>1</sup> triggered the rise of an assertive Moro nationalism and secessionism that still persists today.<sup>2</sup>

One dominant school of thought explains Moro nationalism and secessionism in Mindanao, the southern Philippines, in terms of ethnic politics: according to this explanation, Moro attempts to break away from the Christian-dominated Filipino nation-state are based on a shared understanding that they are culturally different and have historically been averse to the means by which the state has managed Islamic affairs and responded to Muslim concerns (Buendia, 2007). Alternatively, scholars such as Abinales (2000; 2008; 2010) view the violent processes of state-building and regime change initiated by prominent non-Muslim politicians and parties as the fundamental cause of Moro resentment and secessionism. These two explanations notwithstanding, ever since the Jabidah Massacre of 1968, Moro leaders and their militant followers in Mindanao have kept memories of the event alive and appropriated these memories for their personal as well as political ends, including a justification of Moro rebellion. For them, the massacre was a stark reminder of the Christian-dominated Philippine government's gross contempt for Moro culture and aspirations.

In the Christian-dominated national imagination, the Jabidah Massacre was initially quickly forgotten. After dominating headlines in the months following the massacre, there was hardly any mention of the incident in the national press until nearly two decades later when, in 1986, the newly installed Aquino government moved to reinvestigate the incident (Gloria, 1986). Thereafter, however, the Jabidah Massacre received only minimal and sporadic coverage in the mainstream media. Although this issue has remained central to Moro nationalism, only in the past few years have memories of the incident occupied a niche in the national consciousness.

This article seeks to explain the resurgence of memories of the Jabidah Massacre at the national level. We begin by outlining the background to the massacre and the first accounts of it in 1968, and explore why the story of the massacre was suppressed or side-lined for nearly three decades. We then explain the factors that have paved the way for the resurgence of memories since the late 1990s. The incident has been forgotten, remembered and appropriated by different groups in the past four decades due to shifts in the potential of this incident to serve various causes of elite politicians, Moro nationalists or civil society groups. In addition to domestic factors contributing to a revival of interest in the Massacre, the 'war on terror' commencing in 2001 altered the position of Mindanao in the evolving international geopolitical landscape, and this has influenced memories of the incident.

## Event, discourses and amnesia (1968–1998)

Several state-perpetrated brutal killings mark the history of Muslims in Mindanao before and after March 1968. Examples include the killings in Bud Daho (1906) and Bud Bagsak (1911, 1913), the Kamlon rebellion (1950s), and the killings at Manili (1971), Tacub (1971), Malisbong (1974), Patikul (1977) and Pata (1981). Although the Jabidah Massacre was not the first or last of such acts of violence, and the number of Muslim casualties was comparatively small,<sup>3</sup> it stands out in collective memory as an exemplar of the repression of Muslims by the Christian nation-state, and in history as the founding moment of Moro nationalism. Its prominence is due to the timing and location of the incident, its dramatic elements, including the fact that there was a survivor to tell a harrowing story, and the prevailing political situation in the Philippines in the late 1960s.

In the late 1960s, both Muslim and non-Muslim politicians operated to a significant extent within the framework of intra-elite rivalry of the dominant political parties, the Liberal Party (LP) and the Nacionalista Party (NP) (Abinales and Amoroso, 2005; Timberman, 1991; Wurfel, 1988). With President Ferdinand Marcos (NP) poised for re-election in 1969, news of and rumours about the Jabidah Massacre provided an opportunity for the leaders of the opposition Liberal Party, particularly Benigno Aquino Jr, to score political points (Rama, 1968), and therefore Aquino immediately released key details about the Jabidah Massacre to the media.

Early newspaper coverage of the incident emphasized the fact that Marcos had authorized the training of a group of mostly Muslim recruits in guerrilla warfare. They were initially trained on Simunul Island in the Sulu Archipelago, and then transferred to Corregidor in Manila Bay (del Rosario, 1968a; del Rosario, 1968b; Poh, 1996). This so-called Operation Merdeka (Freedom) was designed to infiltrate and destabilize Sabah, which had become part of Malaysia in 1963, but a year earlier had been ceded by the Sultan of Sulu to the Philippines. After gruelling months of training and delays in the payment of salaries, disgruntled recruits mutinied. This prompted their military trainers to execute the mutineers early one morning. Having witnessed the carnage that claimed the lives of his platoon mates, a wounded mutineer, known as Jibin Arula, escaped by jumping off a cliff into the sea. He was rescued some hours later by fishermen, who brought him to a coastal town in Cavite whose governor was an LP politician close to Aquino. Crucial information about Jibin soon reached LP Muslim politicians and Aquino (Lucman, 2000: 155–156). Being a trained journalist himself, Aquino interviewed the survivor. He would have been aware of the use value of the news as a weapon in his fight against Marcos.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the role of Aquino and the media in exposing the incident, Muslim activists, mostly based at the University of the Philippines at Diliman, organized protests and demonstrations. Political ferment in the Philippines and the world over in the late 1960s provided the conditions for the rise of young secular Moro radicals who objected to the collaboration between traditional elites in Mindanao and elites in Manila, often at the expense of the interests of common people. Influenced by Marxism and ideas about radical nationalism and Islamic revivalism, these students were increasingly aware of the marginalization of Muslims and the increasing economic gap between rich and poor. They demanded the creation of a new and just sovereign state led by non-aristocratic Muslim activists (Decasa, 1999; Majul, 1985).

Muslim politicians such as Haroun Al-Rachid Lucman, Salipada Pendatun and Salih Ututalum were convinced that Operation Merdeka was an example of reckless adventurism on Marcos's part which could result in a war against Malaysia. In their speeches before Congress, they lamented that Muslims from the South were exploited to serve the whims and fancies of the Christian-dominated metropolitan government. Operation Merdeka, which tragically ended in the Jabidah Massacre, was, in their view, but the latest in this pattern of exploitation and oppression.

Meanwhile, Aquino conducted his own investigation and declared that there was no clear proof that could support the claim for a massacre. He concluded that the killings were 'panic shootings': not a deliberate slaughter but a mishandling of grievances between armed personnel which resulted in a form of fratricide (Anonymous, 1968). For Aquino, the fact that there was a covert operation to infiltrate Sabah and that Muslim recruits were killed constituted enough political capital to mobilize wider opposition against Marcos.

The mainstream media, however, paid little attention to the subtleties of the results of Aquino's investigation. As the congressional hearings and inquiries regarding the Jabidah incident proceeded, newspapers and magazines such as the *Manila Times*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Philippine Free Press* seized on the notion that a massacre had taken place and that Marcos was the chief architect behind both the murders and their cover-up. Tales of espionage and high-level intrigues circulated that claimed an involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and of British and Malaysian intelligence organizations. While several editorials portrayed Marcos in a negative light, the reports unanimously stressed the legitimacy of the Philippines' claim to Sabah.<sup>5</sup> Critical as they were about the mishandling of the Jabidah incident, the press, alongside many politicians, closed ranks in the face of what to them appeared to be Malaysia's arrogant posturing

vis-à-vis the Philippines' claims to Sabah. Their responses reflected the force of elite Filipino nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thus it was through the agency of the press and of oppositional politicians as well as efforts by Muslim elites to gain public support for their causes that the memories of the Jabidah incident during these volatile years focused on its nature as a massacre. This massacre was depicted as exemplary of the oppression perpetrated by the Christian state and of the status of Muslims as perennial victims. Whereas the old aristocratic Muslim leaders who were long accustomed to collaborating with elites in Manila seized the opportunity to exact more concessions to strengthen their position without challenging the status quo, a parallel and politically more potent form of remembering – one that was to lead to secessionism – was slowly taking shape through the activism of secular Moro students based at universities in Manila. They were led by Nur Misuari, who shared a similar ethno-linguistic background to most of those killed at Corregidor.

In March 1968, Moro students in Manila held a week-long protest in front of the presidential palace. Believing that several dozens of Moro army recruits had been murdered, the students displayed an empty coffin which symbolized oppression and the government's low regard for its Muslim citizenry. They interpreted the tragedy as incontrovertible proof that the problems in Mindanao could no longer be solved within the ambit of the Republic of the Philippines, and that a new nation-state had to be born. As Misuari himself recalled, it was during those nightly vigils that his political career, coinciding closely with the secessionist aspirations of the Moro Nationalist Liberation Front (MNLF), germinated (George, 1980). In our recent interview with him, he reminisced about how the Jabidah Massacre stood at the crest of centuries of Muslim struggle for self-determination and justice which justified the creation of the MNLF. For Misuari, the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which had split from the MNLF, the Jabidah Massacre could only be remembered within the frame of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims that has persisted for many generations (Misuari, 2010).

The intense public focus on the Jabidah Massacre did not last long. Upon the declaration of martial law by Marcos in September 1972, the press and all other viable avenues and voices which could have ensured a continuing focus on the Jabidah Massacre were systematically circumscribed. Moros in the enclave in the South which had, by then, plunged into war against the central government, continued, however, to remember the incident. This restrictive atmosphere continued until the collapse of the authoritarian Marcos regime in February 1986, after which there was increased press attention to incidences of violence and repression during the Marcos years. Civil society groups and concerned individuals called for

a reopening of the Jabidah case. In September 1986, the case was reinvestigated under the jurisdiction of the newly instituted Presidential Commission on Human Rights (PCHR). The purported rationale behind re-opening the case was to investigate related human rights abuses rather than the international dimensions and ramifications surrounding the incident (Casenas, 1986; Gloria, 1986). But wary of rekindling the diplomatic tensions with Malaysia over the claims to Sabah, the PCHR investigation was carried out behind closed doors (Anonymous, 1986).

From 1992, during the presidency of Fidel Ramos, the chance of reaching a peace agreement with the MNLF greatly improved. At the same time, serious questions were raised about whether the Jabidah incident qualified as a massacre. In a 1994 article in the *Philippine Free Press*, Arnold Azurin bluntly called the Jabidah Massacre a myth that Nur Misuari and the MNLF had nurtured, appropriated and promoted for political gain. Azurin also hinted at the involvement of the CIA and at the likelihood that Malaysian spies had infiltrated Operation Merdeka (Azurin, 1994). However, none of his controversial claims attracted sustained media attention or public debate. This does not come as a surprise. Until recently, the broader public lacked interest in almost anything that relates to Muslims in Mindanao. In addition, with Ramos vigorously brokering peace with the MNLF and the Moros reciprocating in kind by seeking a diplomatic compromise, there seemed to be no point in reviving memories of tragic events such as the Jabidah incident.

## Resurgence of memories (1998–2008)

Extending the pattern set in the previous two decades, memories of the Jabidah Massacre did not figure prominently in national public discourses during the Ramos administration (1992–1998). The incident only featured in intermittent ‘filler’ news items covering the annual small-scale commemorative ceremonies organized by the MNLF, in addition to the highly symbolic and high-profile declaration in 1998 of 18 March as the Bangsa Moro Day (Moro National Day) and a public holiday in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) area.

It was only under the Estrada administration that the massacre once more attracted significant national attention. The resurgence of attention to the Jabidah massacre was closely tied to the broad-based efforts to push the peace agenda in Mindanao after it became clear that the settlement with the MNLF had failed to result in lasting peace. Several domestic and international factors converged in the period commencing in 1999 that accelerated the campaign for peace. First, the renewed and intensified open conflict

starting in 1999 between government forces and Moro secessionists, now organized by the MILF, stood in sharp contrast to the relative peace that had reigned in Mindanao over the previous several years.<sup>6</sup> Second, the all-out wars launched by the government in 2000 and 2003, in addition to hundreds of skirmishes, caused damage and prolonged suffering among the masses on a scale not witnessed since the 1970s. This situation triggered a sense of despair among the people of Mindanao, on the one hand, and, on the other, challenged pro-peace groups within Mindanao civil society to expand the movement's constituency within and beyond Mindanao. Activists who had campaigned for peace at the time of the previous peace negotiations between the MNLF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines in the 1990s knew that a broad alliance of Christian, indigenous Lumad and Muslim communities could be a counterweight to the powerful interests who lobbied against concessions to Muslims as requisite to a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Mindanao. Fourth, the enormous cost of open conflict drained the government and the MILF of limited resources, making them both more open to negotiation. Finally, the evolving international geopolitical context shaped by the 'war on terror' made Mindanao appear to be of particular strategic importance. That resulted in much broader international support for a lasting peace in Mindanao to prevent further radicalization of the population.

When Joseph Estrada was elected in 1998, he initially intimated that his administration was serious about building on the gains in achieving peace that had been made by previous administrations. Like Marcos, Aquino and Ramos, he declared that the pursuit of peace in Mindanao was among his top priorities. However, he allowed the hawkish views of his own advisers and of top-ranking military personnel to prevail. After a series of skirmishes in 1999, Estrada declared an all-out war against the MILF in March 2000 (Cagoco-Guiam, 2004: 489). This move effectively overturned the efforts towards a peaceful resolution that the Aquino and Ramos governments had pursued. Despite efforts by various governmental and non-governmental groups to stop the war, the violence between government forces and the MILF continued for several months and caused the suffering of hundreds of thousands who were forced to flee for safety.

In April 2000, a lengthy article about the Jabidah Massacre (Vitug and Gloria, 2000b) appeared on the front page of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, one of the country's most widely circulated newspapers. It seemed pitched to strengthen the call for the Estrada government to stop the all-out war in Mindanao. The article constitutes the most thorough account of the Jabidah Massacre to date, and is notable for its sympathetic tone towards Muslims despite being written by non-Muslims. More significantly, it identifies the Jabidah massacre as one of the well-springs of the ongoing conflict



in Mindanao, something that Muslim leaders had long declared but that had not featured in the Christian-dominated national discourse.

When Gloria Arroyo replaced Estrada in January 2001, she declared an 'all out peace' policy, reversing the previous government's stance on Mindanao. Early talks with the MILF were promising. On 24 March 2001, the Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of Peace Talks was signed in Kuala Lumpur. Even more historic was the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace on 22 June 2001. Viewed against the backdrop of the collapse of previous peace talks, these agreements represented a major advancement.

In early 2002, intermittent fighting between the MILF and government forces broke out again and threatened the peace talks. Negotiations resumed in May 2002. By February 2003, the government had drafted a final peace agreement for presentation to key leaders in Congress. But as if to sabotage the gains in negotiations, the military attacked the MILF's main camp, the so-called Buliok Complex, during the start of Ramadan (Abinales, 2010). To Filipino Muslims, the attack demonstrated once more the military's insensitivity and gross disrespect towards the Islamic faith. The attack was also seen as evidence of the continuing influence of the hawks in the government, and of the government's lack of real commitment to peace (Diaz, 2003: 271). Just when hopes were raised for a potential breakthrough, a full-blown war began. It spilled over from North Cotabato in Mindanao to neighbouring provinces and forced 400,000 people to flee. This exacerbated the sense of gloom and hopelessness that lingered from the memories of the massive all-out war under Estrada's administration in 2000, but only hardened the determination of civil society activists to campaign for lasting peace (Cagoco-Guiam, 2004).

The negotiations were protracted. Since the early gains in 2001, a breakthrough on the sensitive question of ancestral domains did not materialize until December 2004. The term 'ancestral domains' refers to 'land areas, bodies of water, including the aerial space that... since time immemorial, had been accessed... and which... the Bangsamoro [had] laid claim to' (Arguillas, 2007). In April 2005 negotiators agreed on the concept of ancestral domain and the territory and resources that should attach to ancestral domains. The question of governance was complex and initially remained unsolved because the issues involved seem to contravene constitutional provisions. Nonetheless, the overall mood was upbeat and expectant, and prompted the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to declare in early 2005 that the 'biggest obstacle... [was] no longer whether the parties can reach agreement, but whether that agreement can really bring peace and development in the south' (Bacani, 2005: 4). By September 2005,

the contentious issues of governance were overcome. By February 2006, an agreement on the issue of ancestral domains was imminent.

The build-up of a new round of excitement and optimism for long-lasting peace tended to be reinforced by the prevailing atmosphere of much reduced tensions in the past four years, when no major clashes between MILF and government forces occurred. Table 1 shows that, in the period 2004 up to 2007, there were only about a dozen minor skirmishes between the two sides. Considering that there had been hundreds of skirmishes in previous years, including full-blown wars that displaced almost a million people, the lull in hostilities in this period was remarkable, and encouraged hopes for a lasting resolution of the conflict. The presence of the International Monitoring Team under the leadership of Malaysia was duly credited for this situation.

As 2007 drew to a close, the sense of optimism was peaking as rumours about a 'Christmas gift' in the form of an agreement circulated. It came as a shock when the MILF panel boycotted the crucial meeting in mid-December 2007 in Kuala Lumpur in protest against an allegedly deliberate deceit by the government. To people in Mindanao, the news suggested that the talks were being sabotaged. It also showed clearly how fragile the gains were and how illusory the sense of optimism was.

Meanwhile, the 40th anniversary of the Jabidah Massacre was just a few months away. Just like the 10th, 20th and 30th anniversaries that passed without fanfare, this one could have met the same fate had the socio-political context been more or less the same. But history was not to repeat itself. Deeply worried that the talks were collapsing, at a time when they were at a crucial stage, consortiums of peace advocacy organizations went on an all-out campaign. Across cities in Mindanao in January–February 2008, rallies called for the resumption of talks. In March, in preparation for the 40th anniversary of the Jabidah Massacre, the People's Peace Caravan, a

**Table 1.** Number of skirmishes between the MILF and government forces<sup>7</sup>

Year	Frequency
2002	698
2003	569
2004	16
2005	13
2006	10
2007	8

motorcade organized by peace activists, journeyed from Davao City in Mindanao to Corregidor. It served as a launching pad for a year-long drive to generate national support for the peace agenda in Mindanao. On its 1000 km journey, the motorcade attracted the attention of the media and the people along the route. Following a series of press conferences, seminars, media interviews and meetings with civil society organizations, activists concluded the campaign with the unveiling of a commemorative marker to the Jabitah incident. They invited Jibin Arula to unveil the marker and share his memories of what had happened 40 years earlier. Covered by the major media outlets, the occasion was rich in symbolism and generated enormous publicity.

The planting of a commemorative marker to the massacre in itself, and the manner by which the commemoration was accomplished, reflected the dramatic transformation of the socio-political landscape of the Philippines. Changes in the past decade rendered memories of this event less threatening, even useful to various non-state interest groups in their struggle against state or non-state organizations. Aside from figuring more frequently in the national press, the Jabitah Massacre also became the subject of and inspiration for widely broadcast documentaries, a novel and two movies, in addition to commentaries and analyses on various scholarly forums, blogs and other e-media (Aljunied and Curaming, forthcoming). Corregidor Island, a place that was used almost exclusively as a trope for the valour of Filipino, American and Japanese soldiers during the Second World War, now became the publicly acknowledged site of the ignominious Jabitah Massacre.

Unbeknown to the public, negotiations between the rebels and the government were back on track. On 16 July 2008, the panels settled all issues to do with the ancestral domains and agreed on a formal meeting to pave the way for the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). The news was greeted with glee by peace activists but generated a strong reaction from opponents of the agreement. Manny Pinol, a high-ranking politician, made headlines as he vowed that 'We will stop you!' when referring to the agreement. He filed a petition to the Supreme Court to defer the signing and to make public its specific contents (Anonymous, 2008).

Meanwhile, various groups expressed alarm over news of the impending MOA-AD signing. Protest rallies were held in key cities in Mindanao (Arguillas, 2008c; Gloria, 2008). Newspapers carried inflammatory headlines such as 'MOA will bring about Kosovo scenario', 'Christians in BJE will arm themselves to resist MOA', and 'MOA is cowardice on part of the government' (Arguillas, 2008b). The biggest blow that demoralized the broad coalition of peace activists came when, on the day before the

scheduled signing on 5 August, the Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order. Not long afterwards, a full-blown war erupted once again when three MILF base commanders who were angered by the turn of events launched attacks on government forces. In the two months following the aborted signing of MOA-AD, over 100 skirmishes between MILF and the army were recorded. As feared by many, Mindanao was plunged again into war and hundreds of thousands of civilians suffered (Askandar and Abubakar, 2009: 101–104).

Our run-down of these roller-coaster-like events leading to the aborted signing of MOA-AD in August 2008 and the ensuing sharp descent to renewed open conflict is to capture the tension-filled atmosphere of the past few years. It drove the civil society organizations advocating peace to a cycle of hope, anticipation, frustration, exasperation, hope, exhilaration and demoralization. To motivate activists, pro-peace civil society organizations continued to mobilize public support while keeping a close watch on day-to-day developments. Creative and determined, these organizations used all the resources and means at their disposal, including the popularization of memories of the Jabidah Massacre.

That the broad coalition of civil society organizations managed to mobilize so many people should come as no surprise. The Philippines is 'justly famous' for its vibrant, experienced and resourceful civil society (Constantino-David, 1998; Silliman and Noble, 1998; Buck, 2007). Traditionally, in Mindanao civil society groups had not been strong. But since the 1990s, on the heels of the comprehensive consultations undertaken by the National Unification Commission formed by the Ramos administration (see Evangelista, 2003: 60–62), Mindanao civil society grew in strength (LaRousse, 2001). While civil society in the Philippines as elsewhere can never be singular, one important feature of the civil society dynamics in Mindanao during this time was the high level of unanimity on the need to advance the peace agenda to the next level.

## Conclusion

On 18 March 2008, memories of the Jabidah Massacre came full circle, formalizing the outcome of the processes set in train by a complex of events in the past decade. In ways that are unprecedented since 1968, the memories of the Jabidah Massacre have gained a space in the national imagination, made possible and sustained by the important role assigned to them in the civil-society-led lobby for peace in Mindanao. Without exaggerating its symbolic importance, the laying of the commemorative marker on Corregidor Island by the Peace Caravan participants indicates that, notwithstanding systematic containment by Marcos's dictatorship and the

amnesia during Aquino's, Ramos's and Estrada's administrations, favourable socio-political conditions allowed memories of the Jabidah Massacre to be resurrected.

The continuing inroad of Jabidah memories into the Christian-dominated public sphere is clearly shown by the recent spate of widely broadcast documentaries and a full-length movie, in addition to news, commentaries and feature items in various media platforms that non-Muslim Filipinos have initiated. In February 2009 and April 2010, respectively, GMA7 and ABS-CBN – the country's biggest media networks – showed documentaries on the Jabidah massacre. As if riding on this growing wave of interest, in July 2010 the film *Rekrut*, which was inspired by the massacre, was released. Directed by the first-time indie director Danny Añonuevo, and supported by a strong cast of locally known actors, the movie was enthusiastically received. While it may be too early to predict the long-term direction of this development, these productions indicate that there has been a continuing and sharp resurgence of memories of the incident in the public sphere. This resurgence suggests ambiguous messages about the evolving political landscape in the country in general, and about Christian–Muslim relations, in particular.

When viewed against other comparable cases throughout Southeast Asia, the resurgence of memories of the Jabidah Massacre suggests that the main driving force behind both forgetting and remembering is neither simply the pursuit of, nor the outright denial of, historical justice, but the common interests of political stakeholders. This is not to say that the redress of injustice was unimportant. After all, the potency of the Jabidah Massacre as a political symbol primarily rests on it being an exemplar of state violence and injustice. The question of justice played a supplementary – rather than complementary – role across competing political interests. Arguably, those interests shape the way the past is remembered and forgotten.

Earlier attempts by the opposition to thwart Marcos's chance re-election, by Muslim aristocratic politicians to extract concessions from the government, and by Moro activists such as Nur Misuari to launch their political careers, ensured that the Jabidah incident would feature in the national consciousness in 1968–1969. In 2007–2008, memories of the Jabidah Massacre occupied a niche in the national imagination as consequence of efforts by civil society groups to secure peace.

The voices of non-political actors have tended to be effaced in this process. Jibin Arula, the only survivor of the massacre, has repeatedly asked both the government and Muslim political groups for compensation for his and his family's suffering. But these requests have not been addressed. His memories of the incident were important only insofar as they have lent support to already powerful interests.

## Notes

1. In local Muslim lore, Jabidah refers to a beautiful, desirable woman. The name was used to refer to the commando group clandestinely trained to carry out Operation Merdeka, the plan to infiltrate and destabilize Sabah.
2. Moro comes from the Spanish 'Moor'. The term was used by the Spanish colonists since the sixteenth century to denote Muslims who lived in the southern Philippines, an area that included Mindanao and neighbouring islands. Bangsamoro means the Moro nation and refers to the nation that Moro secessionists seek to create.
3. Claims of fatalities in the Jabidah Massacre range from 11 to 'thousands', with 11 being the closest to what available evidence indicates. Fatalities in other massacres were much higher: about 2000 in Pata, 700 in Patikul, 1000 in Malisbong, 40 in Tacub, 73 in Manili, 1000 in Bud Daho and 2000 in Bud Bagsak (GMA News.TV, 2008).
4. For a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the intimate relationship between politics and the press in the Philippines, see Lent (1982) and Smith (2000).
5. It is impossible to cite all newspaper articles and commentaries about the Jabidah case. For detailed insights into this aspect of remembering the Jabidah as well as other popular representations in the form of satirical cartoons and comics, see Poh, 1996.
6. A notable exception to this was the 1995 Abu Sayyaf attack in Pakikul.
7. Based on the data provided by GRP-MILF Joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (Arguillas, 2008a).

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