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Maas Kamlon's Leadership: Resistance, Negotiation, and the Path to Establishing Mindanao State University

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**Abstract**

The historical resistance movements in the Sulu Archipelago represented a powerful event of transformative leadership during the pre-colonial period and through American colonialism, given that the Sulu Sultanate was a formidable maritime state. This research explores the multifaceted dynamics of resistance and negotiation in the context of Maas Kamlon, a visionary folk hero from Luuk, Sulu Archipelago, aiming to unveil the transformative pathways that culminate in an innovative agreement for the establishment of a new academic institution later named Mindanao State University. This paper employed a historical research of resistance and negotiations qualitatively from news reports, academic papers, and biopic films, including 11 in-depth interviews with family members and selected individuals, to investigate Maas Kamlon's nature of resistance and negotiation strategies through transformative leadership. The research findings underline the historical roots of resistance in the Sulu Archipelago and the life of Maas Kamlon, including the timeline of events in which he initiated resistance and engaged in negotiations. Moreover, by employing Burns' theory of leadership and Galtung's theory of positive peace, the establishment of this academic institution symbolizes a transformative initiative to address systemic inequalities and expand educational opportunities for marginalized Muslim and IP communities. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research can serve as a means to incorporate historical events in the Philippines, particularly within history courses.

Keywords: Maas Kamlon, Sulu archipelago, resistance, negotiation, academic institution

In the early 20th century, the Sulu Archipelago emerged as one of the most persistent conflict zones in the southern Philippines. The region was also shaped by historical movements of colonization, local resistance, and transforming patterns of political power, which were the center of Muslim identity and the political order (Majul, 1973; McKenna, 1998). After the fall of the Sulu Sultanate under Spanish and later American rule, colonial governance sought to destroy the native political organization, disrupt traditional leadership, and introduce a centralized framework of governance that largely contradicted local social and cultural realities (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005; Gowing, 1979). All these interventions created structural strains that developed into a full-scale conflict between the 1930s and 1950s as the Muslim communities opposed land dispossession and expanding state power, and the United States vowed to give independence, increasing grievances around the issue of sovereignty and the banks of the culture (Buendia, 2007; George, 1980). These trends of prolonged conflict can be observed in other postcolonial states, such as Kashmir, southern Thailand, and Myanmar, where past wrongs and suspicion have made peace-building efforts complex (Chohan & Amir, 2020; McCargo, 2008; Mitchell, 2005; Mulakala, 2019; Rieffel, 2016).

Resistance and negotiation are closely connected in situations where the marginalization of a group is evident both historically and structurally. Resistance can be relational, silent, organized, or cooperative, and can occur when one type of power interacts with another (Lilja, 2022). Negotiation, in turn, is not limited to conflict resolution; it can be considered a communicative activity, a means by which parties seek recognition, material gains, and lasting resolutions (Adnan et al., 2016). The frameworks are especially applicable in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, where political exclusion, structural discrimination, and unequal development have continued (Adriano & Parks, 2013). For local communities, peace cannot be achieved without justice, dignity, and self-determination, which must be meaningfully represented in negotiations and must also have access to education and development opportunities (Lara & Franco, 2022).

Despite extensive research on Muslim identity, rebellion, and state relations in the southern Philippines (Gowing, 1977; Majul, 1973; McKenna, 1998), little research has examined the lived experiences and political visions of individual leaders. Among them is Maas Kamlon, a Sulu farmer-resistance leader who, in the late 40s and early 50s, took important steps in the development of post-war relations between Muslims and the state in Sulu. He was physically short but widely regarded as brave and determined. His fight attracted national and international interests up to the arrival of the Nenita Elite Unit in Sulu in 1951, and American *napalm*¹ finally gave the green light to attack his troops in 1952 (Time Magazine, 1952). Although in the context of contemporary media, Maas Kamlon was portrayed as either a security threat or a troublemaker (Alonto, Mangelen, Amilbanga, 1954; Philippine Senate Records, 1950), historical documents and eyewitness reports reveal a more complex situation: Maas Kamlon had been involved in early reconciliation as early as 1947 but went back to armed resistance once the talks had collapsed (Alonto Committee Report, 1954; Omar, 2018). His leadership aimed to resist unfair land development, attack the post-war state systems, and restore the sovereignty of the Sulu Sultanate (Omar, 2018). In 1952, Maas Kamlon had a backdoor conference with the then-Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay, during which he expressed his political intentions and a vision for education and community development (Yegar, 2002).

The history of opposition in the Sulu Archipelago dates back to the precolonial era. The Sulu and Maguindanao Sultanates were powerful polities that exerted greater influence over Mindanao, Palawan, and the Visayas, well before Spanish colonization in 1521 (Majul, 1973; Warren, 1981). The Sulu Sultanate was founded in the 15th century by Sultan Sharif al-Hashim, and it was very powerful in its economic and maritime status. It was an independent state that practiced Islamic principles and was resistant to colonial assaults (Abreu, 2008; Scott, 1994). Its opposition had cut across three

¹*Napalm* is a highly flammable incendiary weapon developed during World War II by U.S. scientists. It consists of a gelling agent mixed with gasoline or a similar fuel, designed to adhere to surfaces and burn at extremely high temperatures, and is often used in counterinsurgency and jungle warfare (Kearns, 2009).

centuries of Spanish colonialism and even extended into American and Japanese occupations, as demonstrated by the Bates Agreement (1899), Carpenter Agreement (1915), and military campaigns against leaders like Datu Hassan at Bud Bagsak (Arnold, 2011; Cloman, 1923; Fulton, 2007). These moments reveal how past generations fought with historical roots for freedom, equality, and cultural independence, which explains why Maas Kamlon later opposed this approach.

Nevertheless, despite these historical accounts, little systematic analysis has been done of Maas Kamlon, his leadership, negotiations, and institutional influence. This paper addresses this gap by examining how the resistance of Maas Kamlon went beyond armed conflict to encompass political discourse, educational advocacy, and institutional transformation. Remarkably, the negotiations with the Philippine government led to legislative measures that paved the way for the establishment of Mindanao State University, which was officially opened in 1961, indicating the impact of his leadership on long-term politics and education (Alonto, 1955).

This study aims to reveal the identity, leadership path, and negotiation patterns and theoretical consequences of the life of Maas Kamlon, guided by the following research questions: (a) How do people remember and describe the identity of Maas Kamlon and his leadership? (b) What were the most important events and impetuses that contributed to his shift from farmer to resistance leader? (c) What was the process that occurred in the negotiations between Maas Kamlon and the Philippine government, and what were the end results that were achieved by the negotiations to help build an academic institution? (d) What can theories of transformative leadership and peacebuilding tell us about the goals and activities of Maas Kamlon?

Based on the interpretivist paradigm, this study employs a qualitative historical method to examine archival collections, oral histories, and lived narratives with the objective of foregrounding marginalized voices and placing resistance in context within the framework of negotiation, leadership, and education reform (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research, by combining past and present insights, can lead to a better understanding of peacebuilding, leadership, and Muslim freedom in the southern Philippines.

Methodology

In this paper, the research design is a qualitative historical study that focuses on the untold history of Maas Kamlon's resistance and negotiation with the Philippine government in the post-war Sulu Archipelago. To fill a gap in the literature, in which Maas Kamlon is predominantly portrayed as a rebel rather than an in-depth character, the research would be exploratory and descriptive, combining historical content analysis and semi-structured interviews to produce contextually grounded data.

The conceptual basis is the theories of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) and peacebuilding (Galtung, 1969), which were translated into methodological modes of analysis rather than lenses of perception. The transformational leadership was operationalized on four analytical dimensions, such as moral purpose, collective orientation, social change vision, and empowerment of followers, which were used in coding and interpreting leadership-related narratives in both the archival history and interview transcripts. Maas Kamlon's ethical justification of resistance, education promotion, and perceived legitimacy was a collective orientation, with education, advocacy, and uplifting community narratives as means of empowering followers. In addition, the theory of peacebuilding (Galtung, 1969) was conceptualized in negative and positive peace, structural violence, local agency, and institutional change, and applied to the analysis of armed encounters, negotiating episodes, and post-conflict initiatives. Ceasefires and armed confrontations were considered in terms of negative peace; education, institutional engagement, and social inclusion were analyzed in terms of positive peace; structural violence was applied to examine the outcome of land dispossession and

political exclusion, and long-term results of negotiation, especially the development of educational initiatives associated with Mindanao State University, were examined in terms of institutional transformation.

Historical news articles, local poetry, diaries, books, and biographical films in online archives and institutional repositories were analyzed for content. Thematic issues such as resistance, leadership, negotiation, and collective memory were detected by systematic coding. To improve interpretive rigor, cross-referencing of numerous sources was used, with primary consideration given to first-hand accounts, and local historians and cultural experts were consulted.

Moreover, eleven (11) purposively chosen participants were invited to an interview during the period between October 2023 and March 2024. The selection of participants was based on generational knowledge, lived experience, and recognized community roles, which aligns with the principles of qualitative sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). Family members, relatives, *taumaas* (elders), and local leaders were included in the sample. Interviews followed Spradley's (1979) ethnographic approach, which allowed emic views to shine through. All the interviews were either in person or by phone and recorded with the help of field notes, which were transcribed word-for-word. The data analysis was done using the thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2012), which entailed a combination of inductive and theory-based interpretation. To elaborate further, the analysis of multimodal interaction (Goodwin, 2000; Norris, 2004) was used to examine culturally entrenched non-verbal communication within the dialogical framework proposed by Lyons (2007). Culturally appropriate interpretations were ensured through member checking and follow-up consultations.

The criteria of trustworthiness were based on those of Creswell (2013). It was decided to maintain credibility by using extended interaction, member checking, and peer debriefing with the subject matter experts; transferability by thick description; dependability by audit trail; and confirmability by collaborative and reflexive analysis. Ethical considerations were integrated throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained in accordance with Creswell's (2013) guidelines. Anonymity was ensured by the use of pseudonyms where required, and participants were given freedom to answer in their own languages. Language and cultural experts validated the translations. The analysis was directed by reflexivity to keep violence romanticized or outside external interpretations so that external insights were not imposed on historically marginalized voices.

Results and Discussion

This section shows that Maas Kamlon was seen by many people in the Sulu Archipelago as a hero who stood up for their rights, beliefs, and way of life. While some reports from outside called him a bandit, the Sulus² respected him as a leader who resisted what they saw as an unfair and foreign government. The timeline of his actions shows that his fight was not just about armed struggle, but also about protecting their *adat* (customs), including the *hula* (community), *bangsa* (people), and *agama* (religion). He felt oppressed by laws that did not respect the community's culture and faith, and his meetings with government leaders showed his deep frustration with the system. Drawing from the participant narratives, news reports, academic papers, and biopic films, this section presents themes that examine the life of Maas Kamlon and the negotiations that followed. One key result of these efforts was the founding of an educational institution representing a transformative effort to confront systemic inequalities rooted in colonial legacies, centralized governance, and ethnocentric development priorities (Lara & Champain, 2009; Rodil, 1994) that ignored historically 'marginalized' indigenous Muslim and IP communities in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. His life, struggles, and the ways that led to positive change prove that the resistance was not just for himself but for the future of his people.

²In this paper, 'Sulus' refers to the people of the Sulu Archipelago, defined by geography regardless of ethnicity.

The Name They Called *Kamlon*

Maas Kamlon is remembered as a brave and strong leader in Sulu after the war. He was born as Kamlon Haji Y Angsa, the second-eldest son of the *panglima* (commander) of Luuk, in the Sulu Archipelago. His childhood, as revealed in anecdotes and the 1981 film *Kamlon*, was influenced by the traditional Sulu Sultanate leadership that followed *adat* and *agama*. People in the Sulu Archipelago often call him Datu Hadji Kamlon Manikan Abduhaji, or simply Kamlon Manikan Abduhaji, and they revere him as a local hero. At Mindanao State University–Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography (MSU-TCTO), there is a monument in Maas Kamlon Hall that highlights his significance to the Sulu Archipelago's history and identity. Yet in international news and narratives, the way he is represented can be more complicated.

In a 1952 article in *Time Magazine*, he was depicted as “a peaceful farmer who had turned to banditry,” while simultaneously characterizing him as “one of the toughest—a clever, poker-faced bandit leader.” This illustrates the differing perspectives and narratives surrounding him. As Mitchell (2005) explains, individuals who oppose the government are frequently depicted negatively, even when they are defending their communities.

Life and Background: What Made Him Who He Was

Although Maas Kamlon's birth date was not registered, historians say he was about 70 years old when he organized about 100 men to fight against the government (Vitug & Gloria, 2005). His wife recalled that Maas Kamlon was nearly 80 years old (S.P. Ali-Dans, personal communication, January 24, 2024). In the same interview, Maas Kamlon was 7 years old when American Major General Leonard Wood served as Governor of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu in 1903, which placed his estimated year of birth around 1895. According to this estimate, he would have been about 46 years old in 1947, 56 in 1952, and around 90 when he died. Also, as confirmed by Informant A, “His death occurred in the first quarter of 1985, and he was laid to rest in Kan Minnung, Niangkaan, Luuk”.

Furthermore, Maas Kamlon was a pure Sulu of Buranun ancestry of Luuk in the Sulu Archipelago. His ancestry goes back to Datu Abduhaji, son of Datu Angsa, or Maharaja Angsa of the Luuk-Tandu District, whom the Sulu Sultan recognized as the grandson of Datu Baluan of Tapul Island. Other sources call him, rather, his father, Datu or Haji Angsa, a form of the same that might be an implication of some naming traditions that join titles of father and ancestor. His mother is Pahira Manikan Abduhaji, known locally as Maas Pahing.

He was married to Dayang Adjuria, the daughter of datu Bangkal, and together they had two children: Basaron Kamlon, who became a Brigadier General, and Adilon Kamlon, a private of the Philippine Air Force (Informant A, personal communication, January 14, 2024).

As Mawallil (2016) notes, he was regarded as a father, a loving and loyal husband, and one of the fiercest warriors of the Sulu Archipelago, and his brother, Datu Alibbon Angsa, as the chief of staff, supported him. Despite being portrayed as uneducated, he had learned through reading the Holy Quran (Tan, 1977).

How His Leadership was Viewed and Respected by the Public

In the Sulu Archipelago, particularly among the *taumaas* (Sulus elders) and the Sulus, the title ‘Maas’ conveys an honorific sense of wisdom and respect, representing not rebellion for its own sake, but rather dignified resistance. Mawallil (2016) noted that many view his name as synonymous with ‘hero’, particularly among the marginalized and those from the masses. These community-level perspectives were further reinforced through semi-structured interviews conducted in Bongao and Jolo from October 2023 to March 2024, where respondents repeatedly framed Maas Kamlon as a protector of the land and a leader who remained loyal to his people.

As Geertz (1973) emphasized, understanding culture involves interpreting the meaning people give to their lives. In this context, the narratives of *Taumaas A* from Jolo shared valuable insights into how Maas Kamlon is remembered as an important cultural and moral leader in the community.

Asal siya mapatabangun ha kawman, bukan hat ha kakampungan. Bilang ama sin manga anak niya, nabilang da isab siya ama kawman sabab sin in hahanglaan bang awun unu-unu parakala jumatu ha kawman, sabab sin panghati niya ha agama iban adat, misan siya wayi nakapangadji milikan.

[TRANSLATION]

He is naturally helpful to the communities, not only to his relatives. As a father to his children, he was also the father of the community because he was the one the people lent to if anything happened in the community. This is because of his knowledge of religion and culture, even though he was not educated in the American way.

This account reveals how Maas Kamlon's community understood leadership and authority through the frameworks of *agama* and *adat*, in contrast to Western-style leadership introduced during colonization. The observation that he lacked a formal Western education serves as a reflexive counter-narrative, challenging the notion that leadership is contingent upon formal schooling or governmental titles. Consistent with Burns' (1978) conceptualization, authentic leadership is grounded in moral purpose and the capacity to inspire change, rather than in the possession of formal positions or bureaucratic authority.

Maas Kamlon is remembered not for holding a formal title, but as an *ama kawman*—a father of the community—who cared for, guided, and led his people. His role encompassed *masandal* (moral uprightness), *panglima* (military leadership), and *mu'allim* (teacher of religion), reflecting a holistic conception of leadership rooted in ethics, culture, and communal responsibility. His struggle centered on defending land, people, and values, exemplifying what Scott (1985) describes as a moral economy, in which resistance emerges when established social rules and communal expectations are violated. Maas Kamlon's actions sought to uphold *martabbat* (dignity) and the well-being of his community, grounded in indigenous moral and legal systems rather than imposed authority. Accounts from *Taumaas* further underscore that he is remembered not merely for his deeds but for what he embodied during periods of crisis: a protector, a moral guide, and a symbol of resistance and cultural survival.

His memory also lives on in oral poetry, especially in a traditional Sulu poem called *Tarasul*, which Anthar Alrashid, also known as Dulang Puti, wrote and posted on social media on December 23, 2017. He was described as:

*Usug sibi-sibi matugas in pagbaran
Di kupalan bang hat punglu sinapang
Piyaganak ha Lupa' Sug kilal sin katan
Usug maisug bang pa satru di' magparaug
Di' misan muti in tikud-tikud.*

[TRANSLATION]

*He is a small man with a hard-built body
who does not take cover from a gun bullet.
He was born in Jolo and is known to everyone.
Courageous as he is to his enemy, he does not
want to lose
and didn't even whiten his heels (running from a
fight).*

This *Tarasul* reveals that what people remember most about Maas Kamlon is closely tied to concepts of honor, courage, and perseverance. These values are significant in the Sulu Archipelago and in most Muslim cultures, particularly in leadership and in the fight for what is good. As McKenna (1998) and Majul (1973) emphasize, local leaders are valued not only for their power but also for adhering to moral principles and being regarded as genuine leaders by their people. Besides, the name of Maas Kamlon reminds us of these principles even today.

An examination of diverse textual sources, including poems and news reports, reveals that Maas Kamlon's name carries different connotations depending on the perspective. In government

and external accounts, he is frequently associated with conflict or perceived as a threat. In contrast, local poems, songs, and oral narratives depict him as a symbol of resistance against injustice and a representation of communal strength. As Daytec Yañgot (2023) observes, oral traditions can contest official histories by reaffirming local values, collective identity, and social cohesion. These narratives illuminate how communities remember Maas Kamlon's struggle as a sustained symbol of honor, courage, and the assertion of local agency and self-governance.

Ideology and Moral Worldview: Why Did He Resist?

The idea of a moral economy developed by Scott (1985) offers a helpful approach to Maas Kamlon's attitude towards resistance, since when communal values, traditions, and a sense of rightness are broken, the collective movement begins. The reason behind his struggle was not self-interest but a duty to protect the honor and welfare of his people, which was based on *martabbat* and inspired by the *agama* and *adat*. He was therefore considered a moral leader who stood up for communal values in times of crisis. True leadership, as stated by McKenna (1998) and Majul (1973), is not based on the use of formal power but compliance with ethical standards; this is the kind of leadership that Maas Kamlon portrayed as the impact of his leadership on the Sulus still upholds an image of righteousness, protection, and moral authority.

According to the statements of the *taumaas*, his role was not just in resistance but in the person he was: moral uprightness, communal protection, and cultural continuity. To the Sulus, his fight was not seen as banditry, but rather a fight against culture and lifestyle. Whereas outside sources, such as Time Magazine, described him as a bandit, local accounts portrayed him as a hero defending the land, religion, and tradition (McKenna, 1998). According to Saleeby (1908) and Jundam (1991), the *martabbat* is foundational to the identity of the Muslim Filipinos, and the implication of any threat to dignity is the need to fight back. Such episodes of cultural threat ultimately create legitimate leadership, as argued by Majul (1973). The need to document these memories, hence, calls for ethical sensitivity, and the researchers work between the roles of outsider and keen listener, because the memories of *Taumaas A* show that Maas Kamlon is both a warrior and a symbolic representation of cultural survival and a stronghold.

What Kamlon's Name Means Today?

For the many Sulus, the name Maas Kamlon is still remembered with pride and dignity. Even decades after his death, stories about him still linger in speech, memories, and local culture. These memories are not only of what he did, but of what he represented, as narrated by Informant C:

One day in 1977, I was at the Jolo airport waiting to take a flight to Manila. The aircraft arrived, and a lean old man descended and walked through the arrival path. He wore the traditional "Berino" attire that stood out among other passengers. Who was that? I asked. The airport security proudly exclaimed, "that was Apu Kamlon. It was my first time (and the last) to see him. His wife frequently visited our house when we were kids. She was our healer when we were kids. But I never got to see the old man until then (Informant C, personal communication, January 14, 2024).

This story also gives a personal touch to how people remember Maas Kamlon, based on real-life experiences and shared memories. In 1981, the film *Kamlon* was featured at the Manila Film Festival, as illustrated in Figure 1, derived from the narration of his eldest son, Basaron A. Kamlon. The film featured Ramon Revilla and centered on significant events in the life of Maas Kamlon, such as his fight against colonial and national governments, his ethical conflicts, and his intrigues with government officials. This movie brought his story to a broader audience. It was not merely entertainment but a means of cultural recall and an act of reclaiming the past from a Sulus perspective.

Along with the movies and narratives, another important medium of remembering Maas Kamlon

is the *Tarasul*. It is a written expression of communal meanings of heroism, as it interweaves history, culture, and moral values. In these poetic narratives, Maas Kamlon is always a savior of his people rather than a rebel or a criminal. This is a form of remembrance that parallels the remembrance of *panglima* Sayyadi³ by *kissa*⁴ and the traditional logic of *parang sabil* (Dino et al., 2023; Ingilan & Adburajak, 2021). According to the description of *parang sabil*, which was commonly portrayed as indiscriminate violence in the popular media, it was rather a religious and patriotic measure, as explained by Sakili (1999), cited in Ingilan (2018), and Majul (1999), and was interpreted as the last form of resistance against colonization.

The way people remember Maas Kamlon connects to the ideas of peace as theorized by Johan Galtung (1969) and to the notion of peace transcending the absence of armed warfare into aspects of justice and the safeguarding of human dignity. The Maas Kamlon remembrance serves as a symbolic challenge to the state and media accounts that place him as a bandit through the songs, films, and local narratives. In 1981, his son gave an account that led to this counter-narrative when the film Kamlon portrayed him as a leader divided between moral duty and political pressure as opposed to being an insurgent. In this regard, these cultural representations challenge what Galtung defines as structural and cultural violence by healing silenced voices and historical agency. Although national publications tend to portray Maas Kamlon as a national security threat, Sulu's collective memory has preserved him as a moral leader who defends dignity, homeland, and belief, making his name a permanent emblem of honor, bravery, and fighting.

Figure 1

Biopic Film Poster, Kamlon (Source: Yandoc, 1981)



From Being a Farmer to a Fighter: Roots of Resistance

Maas Kamlon was first a farmer and lived a humble life in Luuk, Sulu Archipelago. However, he noticed many issues in his community over time. He believed that the government was not doing

³A Sulu resistance leader and *panglima* (local commander) from the Sulu Archipelago who is remembered in local history, *kissa* (narratives), and oral traditions as a defender of land, faith, and community during periods of colonial and external intrusion.

⁴According to Majam and Sahira (2009), *kissa* is an oral narrative archived from a cassette tape.

anything for the people and was being unjust to them. For this reason, he decided to rebel. And this marked the start of his transition from farmer to resistance leader. The timeline below outlines the events that led Maas Kamlon to spark the resistance.

At the same time, the government initiated a campaign to disarm lawless individuals, juxtaposing the complaint against him in the Court of Justice of the Peace. This was during a period of disarmament, when the government urged all lawless individuals with followers and firearms, including bandits, to surrender their weapons, as reported by Informant A. The root cause of the resistance was further expounded by Informant B:

Tiyuntutan siya pasal sin pagsukud sin lupa' iban awun nabunu siya in tiyuhuma misan bukun siya in nakabunu. Pagtuntut kaniya na di' siya makaalup parinta pasal di siya makahati sin paragan sin parinta sin sara. Iban bang kaw imalup parinta ha waktu yadtu aturun kaw gapi sin parinta. Amu yadtu in panghati nila. Iban di' tuud siya mabaya umalup sin parinta pasal bukun parinta sin bangsa niya iban bukun nagaagama sin agama kiyakagahagad niya biya sin agama sin bangsa niya.

[TRANSLATION]

He was charged with a land survey issue, and someone was killed. He was accused, even though he did not do it. He can no longer face the government upon his charge because he does not know how they run the law. And if they face the government at that time, they are assumed to be collaborators. That is their understanding. He does not want to face the government because it is not the government of his people, and they are not believers in what he believes, like the belief of his kind (Informant B, personal communication, January 11, 2024).

This was validated by Taumaas D:

Nagtagna mayan in parinta nag-urul naghati sin kalupalupaan sin waktu yadtu, kiyalamud in lungan niya, iban sin awun nara niya nagsagga pasal sin lupa niya. Nagbihadtu mayan tiyuntutan siya sin parinta, na ampa in siya wayi panghati sin undang-undang sin parinta dayu, amura in kaingatan niya sara sin kawman labay daing ha adat iban agama. Nabihadtu mayan, gimuwa na siya pa gulangan, imatu ha parinta iban imatubang ha parinta bang mayan kajagahan in hak niya pa hula nila iban kawman nila.

[TRANSLATION]

When the government surveyed the lands, his land areas were included, and he disputed with someone about his land. When that happened, the government charged him, and he had no understanding of the foreign government's laws, only the laws based on culture and religion. When that happened, he went to the jungle, fought, and confronted the government to protect his rights to their land and community (Taumaas D, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

These memories can be seen to have shown the logic underpinning the resistance of Maas Kamlon: an ideological rejection of foreign-imposed rules and a concurrent reclaiming of indigenous rule over land, law, and moral authority. His withdrawal to the jungle was not only a military response but also an ideological withdrawal of state legitimacy from marginalized communities, which Scott (2009) described as non-state spaces where they are striving for autonomy, beyond the reach of centralized power.

Oral histories also add to the problematic reductivist explanations of Maas Kamlon as a mere insurgent. He is described as a political leader and a source of morality in the community, which the witness confirms, Taumaas A:

Bilang ama sin manga anak niya, nabilang da isab siya ama kawman... sabab sin panghati niya ha agama iban adat.

[TRANSLATION]

As a father to his children, he was also the father of the community because of his deep understanding of religion and custom (Taumaas A, personal communication, December 18, 2023).

These stories convey an idea of leadership based on a moral economy, in which power rests on ethical behavior and collective responsibility rather than on a position, office, or coercion. Although he was not educated in the West, a factor known as *wayi nakapangadji milikan*, his legitimacy stemmed from the lived experiences of Sulu values and daily justice practices. Reflexively, the involvement of the researchers with informants shows that the narratives do not just narrate the historical events; they are also productive in the sense of the creation of collective meaning. Maas Kamlon is remembered as an *ama kawman*, the personage of communal care, religious basis, and traditional justice. His leadership was not conferred through an electoral process, nor did it entail any administrative office; it was socially conferred through trust, mutual suffering, and moral fidelity. This means that leadership is perceived as relational and performative, sustained through the recognition of the community.

Based on government documents and community accounts, the life of Maas Kamlon was characterized by a recurring cycle of surrender and renewed resistance. His relationship with the state followed a consistent pattern: dialogue would be initiated, and grievances articulated, yet these were either disregarded or outright denied, compelling him to resume armed struggle. Between 1947 and 1952, he surrendered multiple times, only to return to resistance as injustices remained unresolved. This persistent defiance eventually drew the full attention of Ramon Magsaysay, then Secretary of National Defense, along with his American adviser, Edward Lansdale, as shown in Figure 2. On July 31, 1952, Kamlon once again surrendered to Magsaysay, framing his struggle in deeply personal terms—emphasizing his desire to secure education for his children so they would not be driven to rebellion. This statement reflects not a concession to immediate political pressures, but a moral appeal oriented toward the future generation.

Figure 2

Ramon Magsaysay and Edward Lansdale (Source: McKenna, 2024)



It is through fierce military conflict that he capitulated in 1955 at Tandu Panuan. In that same year, a Special House Committee, after listening to his complaint, suggested that schools be established in Mindanao and in the Sulu Archipelago—an initiative that became a reality with the introduction of the Mindanao State University in 1961. The resistance by Kamlon, therefore, gave rise to an institutional effect showing that rebellion can be a communicative action that brings about political and structural change. His plight fits the framework of structural violence and positive peace proposed by Galtung (1969) in response to structural exclusion and as a call to institutional inclusion. At the cultural level, the performative aspect of resistance is highlighted, with Maas Kamlon represented as

an outlaw and a hero. His stories remain in oral traditions, such as poetry and media images, which perpetuate collective identity and serve as a political intervention affirming Muslim legacy, while not acknowledging the sovereignty within the national imaginary.

Through interpretive and reflexive ethnographic analysis, this research reveals that narratives of Maas Kamlon define resistance as a moral reaction to the cultural erasure, dispossession, and repeated betrayal. Sulu Archipelago post-war leadership turns out to be communal and relational, based on *agama* and *adat*. Maas Kamlon is also remembered as a moral leader and symbol of unresolved justice, shedding light on the possibilities and constraints of negotiation when state arrangements deny indigenous power. As presented in Table 1, the sequence of events clarifies how acts of resistance and so-called “surrenders” were shaped by shifting political conditions and contested interpretations.

Table 1

The Timeline of Events that Maas Kamlon Started Resistance and What the Government Refers to as “Surrenders.”

Year	Event
1947	He turned himself in to the government for the first time while earning a reputation as a “perennial troublemaker.”
1948	He initiated an uprising in Luuk, Sulu Archipelago, which prompted the government to commence Operation Kamlon Number I.
1949	He decided to take a different path and meet with Colonel Diosdado Rodriguez, despite becoming a victim of persecution and political intrigue, indicating his willingness to engage in dialogue and find a peaceful resolution to the issues he had been fighting for.
1951	He led the ambush and wiped out Nenita Unit, a Korean War veteran, with the use of Kris and Barung, traditional Sulu-bladed weapons.
1952	He initiated another fight, but on July 31, 1952, he turned himself in to Secretary of Defense Ramon Magsaysay at Lahing-Lahing, Luuk. When Ramon Magsaysay asked why he was fighting the government, his response was about education for his children and people so they would not fight the government like him in the future. A week later, he started another uprising and turned himself in to the government again on November 9, 1952. After he met with Ramon Magsaysay, Congress established a Special House Committee comprising Senator Domacao Alonto of Lanao, Congressman Mangelen of Cotabato, and Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa to investigate Maas Kamlon’s grievances and concerns about why he was fighting against the government.
1953	In early 1953, according to the government, he violated the terms of ceasing the fight by initiating another uprising. By August 11, 1953, he turned himself in to the government again after encountering government troops.
1954	In July 1954, the government planned an operation against Maas Kamlon’s brother, Alibbon, who had emerged as an even greater threat. His name echoed with defiance and tenacity in their struggle against authority. On August 3, 1954, the Red Group of the 11th Scout Ranger Class took action against Alibbon, whom they had identified as the “toughest outlaw,” along with his approximately 40 equally notorious and heavily armed men. The encounter lasted 18 hours, making it the longest of the 1954 military combat operations against their enemy in Jolo.
1955	The Special House Committee, comprising Senator Domacao Alonto of Lanao, Congressman Mangelen of Cotabato, and Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa, which investigated Maas Kamlon’s grievances and concerns, recommended establishing a university. Senator Domocao Alonto authored the Charter, known as RA 1387, approved on June 18, 1955, amended as RA 1893, RA 3791, and RA 3868, formally establishing Mindanao State University, which opened its doors on September 1, 1961. On September 24, 1955, for the last time, he turned himself in again to the government in Tandu Panuan, Luuk. This was after they encountered government troops in a long-drawn-out and expensive campaign against him that led to some of his 190 warriors being killed, with 48 wounded and 82 captured.

A variety of sources, such as books, news clippings, films, and local tales, pointed to a range of situations perceived as the causes or preconditions of the resistance of Maas Kamlon. But Tan (1977) cites the three most probable causes of his long struggle, which placed a heavy burden on the government. Firstly, Maas Kamlon faced serious obstacles from powerful individuals in Tandu Panuan, especially Binang, Suhaili, and Sasawan, and they were his opponents. In purport, the wealth of Maas Kamlon aroused jealousy among them, and they were trying to deprive him of his estates. This war intensified even further in 1942 when Binang tried to claim the lands of Maas Kamlon. Nonetheless, Maas Kamlon successfully resisted the attack by Binang, forcing Binang to seek the help of Datu Hadji Tahil. Later, on a retaliatory attack, Binang burnt the house of Maas Kamlon on Tandu Panuan, and Maas Kamlon retreated to what was to be called Kamlon Hill. Prior to the end of the Second World War, Maas Kamlon was able to remove Suhaili and Sasawan, which increased Binang's urge for revenge. The second important episode in the struggle of Maas Kamlon took place in Binang, where he finally gave in to the authorities in 1949. Maas Kamlon feared the government would turn him over to Binang if he surrendered. The third factor that reinforced Maas Kamlon's worry was Asmawil's criminal accusation against him, alleging his involvement in the wartime killing of Adjural, a Japanese collaborator. Asmawil aimed to hinder Maas Kamlon from supporting Congressman Ombra Amilbanga in the 1949 election. Consequently, the fear of imprisonment, where his political adversaries could easily reach him, motivated Maas Kamlon to seek refuge in the hills, further isolating himself from the government. Despite the actual circumstances, Maas Kamlon's perception of reality remained firmly entrenched in these worries (Tan, 1977), as further supported by Informant B:

Nagtagna in hilu nila yan iban parinta sin dihilan siya supina. Pagpara kaniya di' niya kaingatan bassahun, iban di'siya mabaya umalup ha parinta. Sakali pagkasiya wayi nakaalup parinta na miyuk in tuntut kaniya iban nagserve na sin warrant of arrest. Ampa niya liyagut katan in naghatud sin warrant of arrest. Didtu na nagtagna in hilu iban sin parinta. Nakatuw san siya iyan pasurindirun iban jijanjian siya papaguwaun da hi Quirino.

[TRANSLATION]

That conflict started with the government when he was served the subpoena. When the subpoena was served, he could not read and refused to face the government. When he failed to face the government, the charge became effected, and the arrest warrant was served. And then he hacked everyone who brought the warrant of arrest to him. That is where the conflict with the government started. He was called to surrender three times and promised to be released by Quirino (Informant B, personal communication, January 11, 2024).

This account was corroborated by the response of Taumaas B and D:

Nakanat man ha kawman in pagtuntut kaniya iban sin pagpara kaniya sulat, asal siya di' na tuud kaamuhan ha parinta, hangkan diya niya na tuud nagpugpug in parinta, liyamuran na siya in kakampungan niya. Mataud na in dima nagbissara sin papaguwaun na siya pa parinta, sagawa siyulak niya ra. Daindidtu na kimusug in bunu, piyarahan na manga nabal iban piyagbaman na in kawman.

[TRANSLATION]

When the news of his charge spread in the community, he disliked the government, joined by his relatives, and brought the government to fight. Many people talked to him about joining the government, but he refused. From that, the fighting became intense, the naval was sent, and the community was bombed.

Maas Kamlon gained notoriety for hosting infamous dinners for Japanese officers during their occupation of the Philippines. However, during the same period, some people who held animosity toward him accused him of murdering several estate landowners near his own, sparking an ongoing conflict. In 1947, following the Philippines' independence, the new government sought to hold Maas Kamlon accountable for his wartime atrocities against his fellow islanders in a formal court, separate from his *agama*. However, he managed to evade capture by hiding and resisting authority. After briefly ceasing his resistance against the government, Operation Kamlon Number I began again a year later

in 1948 (Bowers, 1955). Following the charge in 1948, Maas Kamlon, a World War II veteran, found himself engulfed in turmoil. Emerging from the ashes of his past battles, he led a solemn uprising in Luuk, Sulu Archipelago. Amidst the sad echoes of conflict, only 25 individuals rallied under his banner, driven by a sense of duty to address the scars of injustice. Their mission, laden with a sorrowful purpose, aimed to reform land issues, challenge Philippine authority, and reclaim the fading sovereignty of the Sulu Sultanate over their ancestral realms (Omar, 2018).

As time passed, the message delivered by Maas Kamlon became familiar to more and more people, and the following grew to about 100 people. Drawing on their common beliefs, they took up arms left behind by past wars, such as the M1918, including, but not limited to, Browning Automatic Rifles and various types of rifles previously used by the Japanese during World War II. Their activities, especially those directed against the Nenita Korean veteran under the 7th Infantry Battalion, highlighted the resistance movement carried out by Maas Kamlon, as exhibited in Figure 3. This was a challenge to the already struggling young Republic of the Philippines, which was already facing the Hukbalahap revolt (Taylor, 2017). The government had to overcome many obstacles in addressing the concerns of Maas Kamlon and his followers. Maas Kamlon was also firm in his convictions despite the efforts of the Philippines to undermine him by calling him a criminal and a rebel (Mawalill, 2016). However, in 1949, he made another move, despite persecution and political intrigues. As Ryan (2007) explained, he sat down with Colonel Diosdado Rodriguez and expressed his willingness to have a discussion and seek an amicable end to the problems he had been struggling to bring to fruition.

Figure 3

Nenita Elite Unit (Source: McKenna, 2024)



Maas Kamlon was fired up again after a three-year absence. In July, according to The New York Times (1952), Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay marshaled more than 5,000 Philippine military forces, naval vessels, airplanes, and tanks to quash the resurgence of Maas Kamlon. However, on July 31, 1952, it appeared with over three hundred loyal warriors, which, to the government, meant the second-most serious challenge after the invincible Hukbalahap. Maas Kamlon, instead of succumbing to the imminent offensive, the reverse of what had been done to him by Ramon Magsaysay, that is, he sent back the secret rendezvous with him to Luuk, Sulu Archipelago, something which the observers saw as perhaps an attempt to ease tensions in the conflict as exhibited in Figure 4. President Elpidio Quirino strongly denied any suggestion that his handshake with Maas Kamlon was either a sign of capitulation or a surrender gesture (New York Times, September 1952).

This development, in turn, emphasizes the tenacity and strength of Maas Kamlon, who returned to his opposition only a week after he had stopped on August 13, 1952, as covered by the New York Times (1952). Although the Philippine troops returned to Jolo, Sulu Archipelago, to fight his army, Maas Kamlon, along with his supporters, remained resolute in their mission and raided Jolo. Regrettable in number, the resultant battle attests to the indomitable spirit of the participants, as 20,000 casualties were inflicted on Maas Kamlon by his troops.

Figure 4

Ramon Magsaysay in Luuk, Sulu Meeting Maas Kamlon (Source: McKenna, 2024)



Intensive Operation against Maas Kamlon

In July 1952, the Philippine government stepped up military operations in Jolo, Sulu Archipelago, by creating the Sulu Task Force (SULTAF) to neutralize Maas Kamlon and his armed followers. According to Manubay's (1993) report, Colonel Cirilo Garcia, a senior combat officer, was the leader of SULTAF. Manubay (1993) had previously observed that the operations against Maas Kamlon were already prepared even during his assignment in Parang.

On 15 June 1952, Defense Secretary Ramon F. Magsaysay escalated state reaction by deploying the Sulu Sea Frontier, which named Navy Commander Ramon A. Alcaraz as its first commander. Such an initiative was expected to contain armed resistance, suppress smuggling activities, and restore peace and order in the Sulu Archipelago, since, according to government reports, this was a major threat to peace and state revenues (Philippine Navy, 2021). This has been described by Manubay (1993):

Upon arrival at the headquarters of the Sulu Constabulary Command, all the officers were called for a conference, and we were briefed on the enemy situation in Jolo. Then, the briefing officer underscored the mission by pointing out that the main target in the operation was Hadji Kamlon and about 60 fully armed men who had been fighting the government for several years. The officer concluded his briefing with a warning that everyone must be alert in all places at all times; if not, you would be looking for your head. To our surprise, each tried to figure out the magnitude of the danger ahead of us. To kick off the jitters, we were required to bivouac around the camp for the night. We moved to the combat zone the following morning. That was the Luuk district where Kamlon and his men were operating. On our first day of bivouac, we were told that members of a local PC Command unit were ambushed at the national highway. Their vehicle was burned down, and all of them were slain by the ambushers.

This militarized response is further reflected in local accounts as narrated by Taumaas C:

Iyurul na sin sundalu in katan kiyalabayan niya. Liyawag siya bunuun. Hipapatimbak na siya bang siya kakitaan. Asal sila natitipun na ha pigi bud iban ha gulangan ha supaya pagdatung sin sundalu, kaunahan nila misan sila tiyu-tiyuda iban sin sinapang nila karag-karag. Asal misan unuhun lilla na sila katan matay.

[TRANSLATION]

The road he traveled was monitored by soldiers who were hunting him down. He had been given orders to be shot if spotted. They had taken position in the mountainous jungle, prepared to confront any incoming soldiers, even though their numbers were small and their rifles outdated. Regardless of the outcome, they were all willing to die for their cause (Taumaas C, personal communication, January 15, 2024).

In his opinion piece “Hindsight”, published in the Philippine Star on November 2, 2020, F. Sionil Jose, the National Artist for Literature, described Maas Kamlon as a folk hero leading a core group of fewer than 100 followers and noted his intimate knowledge of the local terrain. Although Jose did not meet Maas Kamlon, he spent a month in the Sulu Archipelago and visited the headquarters of Constabulary Colonel Mamarinta Lao in Luuk, where he learned of the difficulties government forces faced in tracking Maas Kamlon despite naval blockades that locals could easily navigate.

In addition, Jose linked Maas Kamlon’s resistance to broader territorial concerns, including the North Borneo claim, a connection reportedly discussed by Dayang-Dayang Tarhata at the Maimbung palace. Historical accounts indicate that the Sulu Task Force (SULTAF) was formally established to compel Maas Kamlon and his allies to submit to state authority, drawing personnel from the 9th and 15th Battalion Combat Teams and the local Constabulary Command in the Sulu Archipelago (Manubay, 1993).

Earlier, in 1951, Maas Kamlon’s forces ambushed Captain Alcantara’s Nenita Unit in the forested area of Sua-Sua, resulting in significant casualties among government troops. The engagement involved the use of traditional Sulu bladed weapons, such as the *kris* and *barung*, underscoring both the combat effectiveness of local fighters and the operational challenges confronting state forces, which subsequently reinforced the strategic rationale for SULTAF’s expanded military campaign (Manubay, 1993).

In 1993, Manubay recounted an emotional narrative detailing the relentless challenges faced by comrades amid fierce combat against Maas Kamlon’s warriors. He recalled that:

It was daybreak when we reached the foot of Mt. Baybay. After a few minutes, I ordered the men to move and proceeded to our target. After a long climb, we reached the top. Sunrise was breaking, and from where we were, the beautiful rays of the sun gave us visual delight. The morning was beautiful and pleasant, with the lustrous grasses still wet with morning dews...I saw a tall Balete tree, a come-on landmark in the forest of Sua-Sua. My combat reflexes made me decide to fire...mount the 60-millimeter mortar, and pepper the vicinity of the Balete tree with three rounds. We tagged along a battle-trained dog. It was funny that imported K-9 had a daily meal allowance of four pesos while soldiers had a peso allowance. I ordered the dog trainer to send K-9 to the forested area. Our Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) man fires a few bursts of flashing fire at the target. There was no retaliation, and everything was quiet. We could only hear birds chirping atop the trees. At six o'clock in the morning, I ordered another burst of flashing fire. The enemy surprisingly returned fire. The firefight broke out...By sheer intuition, our platoon evaded a bloody ambush. We found out later that the bandits were atop the trees, waiting for us to pass by for the kill.

Based on the narratives, each passing day brought increasingly precarious sustenance, leaving them to grapple with the uncertainty of missed meals. Essential resources, particularly water,

decreased, leading to desperate, unsafe baths in the nearby creek. Taumaas B and C confirmed that different *taumaas* were present during the same period and corroborated this. According to Taumaas B,

Kiyatumtuman ku sin waktu mahinaat, naghanggaw, nagjaga. Landu in hunit, magatubang ha bud, lamuran pa sin tingug sin mortar iban katingug sin sinapang.

[TRANSLATION]

It brings back memories. I remember those early morning operations, the tension, the anticipation. Those were tough times, fighting in the mountains with the sound of the 60mm mortar and the rifle's crack (Taumaas B, personal communication, January 15, 2024).

This struggle was similarly recounted by Taumaas C,

Mataud daing ha manga panaiban namu in napila. Sagawa malaggu in maksud iban kugbaya namu tungud pa susungun sin kawman, kakampungan, iban sin angan-angan ha kaanakan

[TRANSLATION]

Many of my comrades paid the ultimate price. But we were driven by a sense of duty and a belief in a better future for our people, for our families, and for the hope of our children (Taumaas B, personal communication, January 15, 2024).

What at first seemed like a normal troop movement towards a nearby creek changed to a high-stakes military faceoff, with some of the troops being ambushed. It is recorded that some of the troops took temporary refuge in the water, but the terrain and situation left them more exposed to fire. To Manubay and his comrades, a soldier had to be not merely competent and tactical but also capable of withstanding the pressure of prolonged engagement, which highlighted the situation the government army found itself in during the war.

In a later report, Manubay recalled a heavy fire tussle between the army of Maas Kamlon and those of the Philippine government in which both parties proved to be very determined. In response to what he perceived as organized insults and advances by the Maas Kamlon group, Manubay (1993) instructed the machine gunner to fire on the place where the attention was directed. The battle is said to have taken about ten hours and led to the deaths of many people. A number of Philippine soldiers were killed, and others became psychologically traumatized. Military accounts also said that government soldiers murdered about twenty individuals in Maas Kamlon's party, injured many others, and took several guns. The very reports indicated that Maas Kamlon himself was injured in the confrontation.

Archival documents also reveal that Maas Kamlon had an encounter with then-Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay on July 31, 1952, and this was documented in the account of Manubay (1993). This was soon followed on August 8, 1952, when government troops initiated Operation Durian, a massive military operation designed to take down or keep at bay Maas Kamlon (Tan, 1977, p. 116). Maas Kamlon was said to have been supported by his brother Alibbon at that time, and some leaders, including Biting, Gampal, Sappayani, and Jimia, and some 300 of his followers, who had, this time around, 200 guns.

This was being done by a battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jorge Sanchez, through the different companies headed by different captains and lieutenants, field artillery, and a medical unit headed by Lieutenant Macadaeg. Military planners believed that Maas Kamlon was hiding in the Mount Baybay area and wanted to mount a combined attack to prevent him from escaping. Lieutenant Colonel Sanchez explained the attack as a necessary action to exploit the destabilization of the forces of Maas Kamlon after a long-term fight, according to the official explanation. Nevertheless, under prolonged pressure, Maas Kamlon and his men were said to have made a breakthrough on the

government troops' right flank, causing even more casualties on both sides, highlighting the dynamic and disputed nature of the conflict.

The troops found themselves completely encircled by Maas Kamlon's group, and the exchange of fire became intense and deadly. As narrated by Manubay (1993):

We were well prepared, willing to fight, and ready to die. Our desire to quell the enemy was amplified by heavy machine-gun firing and our non-stop assault. In the maze of the heavy firefight, the consistency of our machine-gun assault forced the enemy to withdraw. The bandits left behind some companions who were cold and dead. Also lying dead was a cow that we later butchered. We boiled and cooked the meat. Without salt, however, the beef was tasteless. We chowed it down, nevertheless, because we were tired and hungry.

After a month of intense military operations in the jungles of Mt. Baybay involving Maas Kamlon and his warriors and their encounters with government troops in the Sulu Archipelago, they ceased the fighting and met with the Defense Secretary.

As Manubay (1993) recalled, Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay's involvement in these operations propelled him to fame and set the stage for his future presidency. Based also on the narrative of Manubay's (1993) confrontation with Alibbon, Maas Kamlon's brother, who posed an even more significant threat than his brother, bringing disobedience and persistence in their struggle against authority. Additionally, on August 3, 1954, despite the sunny weather, danger loomed: the Red Group of the 11th Scout Ranger Class received a warning to take action against the notorious outlaw Alibbon and his men in the southern part of the military operation. Manubay (1993) stated:

The briefing pepped us up, and in high spirits, we crossed the road going south. We immediately penetrated the forest area and sought cover so that no one could see us as we trudged toward the objective in a superb tactical fashion. We avoided stepping on twigs even as we tip-toed cautiously on the dry leaves to prevent the slightest crackle that could lead to detection by the enemy. When dusk fell, we decided to move away from the forest. It was 11 p.m., the moon was bright, and the stars guided us to where we were going. We crept and crawled to a cogonal area. The trudge went on non-stop and almost without sleep. At the stationary positions, the four teams formed a square with each having a lookout guard so that we could visibly anticipate enemy attack from any direction. I volunteered to be the first guard in my team and the rest followed. Before daybreak, we went back to the forest for cover and hid in the dark to get a better position for an ambush. While waiting for our target, we ate our breakfast lying on the ground...The long wait for the enemy kept us glued to the ground for effective ambush position. Meanwhile, it was nearing noon. Hopeful that the outlaws would soon emerge, we remained tight-lipped. No one would talk and we used hand signals to communicate among ourselves...As expected, the enemy turned up. We heard footsteps moving toward us. Then we received a hand signal confirming that the enemy was sighted. We allow them to close in on us. Completely unaware of our presence, they playfully threw stones at where we had taken position. Before the advance group of the outlaws could reach our position, we unleashed automatic fire, killing two bandits and recovering two carbines.

According to reports, the Rangers believed the group led by Alibbon had lost its fighting spirit after several confrontations. They began to fear that it would be difficult to fight the Rangers since they could not see them. Known as the "Lizards of the Jungle", the rangers proved more intelligent and strategic, taking down the group's comrades individually. Despite the initial losses of the Alibbon-led group during the firefight in Lianutan, Luuk, they fought back aggressively. However, the encounter lasted 18 hours, making it the longest in the 1954 combat operations of the Philippine military in Jolo. The 11th Scout Ranger Class showed impressive resilience, repelling the enemy without casualties. The firefight resulted in several deaths on the Alibbon-led group's side, including one member carrying a Caliber 45 pistol marked "Captain Alcantara", the name of the official wiped out during the 1951 Jolo

operations (Manubay, 1993, p. 66).

In a surprising turn of events, Maas Kamlon unexpectedly turned himself over to the authorities on November 9, 1952, and this was considered the “first surrender” by the government. As reported by the Canberra Times (1955), President Elpidio Quirino intervened, and he was immediately granted a pardon and released on the following significant dates. First, on November 12, 1952, Elpidio Quirino, during their evening meeting in Malacañang, assured Datu Hadji Angsa and Adjuria, his father and wife, that the government would give Maas Kamlon a fair trial. During that meeting, Col. Agustin Marking accompanied Maas Kamlon aboard the navy boat to Manila at 09:30 in the morning for his formal turnover to Oscar Castelo, then-Justice Secretary and the designated personal representative of Elpidio Quirino (Official Gazette, 1952).

On November 13, 1952, Maas Kamlon was officially handed over to the prison director in Muntinlupa, Rizal, where he would be held in custody while awaiting trial. As promised by President Elpidio Quirino, he was given a fair trial, and the pending charges against him were addressed within two weeks (Official Gazette, 1952). Maas Kamlon stood trial on a navy ship off to Jolo, where he was found guilty and sentenced to prison. Subsequently, he was brought to Manila to serve his term. However, after a few days, as reported by the Canberra Times (1955), President Elpidio Quirino granted him and his men a pardon on November 29, 1952, under conditions of executive clemency with parole, following their conviction by the Sulu court of first instance on charges of rebellion, multiple severe physical injuries, and murders, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Meeting of Maas Kamlon with then-Defense Minister Ramon Magsaysay
(Source: McKenna, 2024)



After pleading guilty and receiving life imprisonment sentences, Major Gen. Calixto Duque recommended that the president consider granting Maas Kamlon and his men a conditional pardon. However, during his meeting with Maas Kamlon, Ramon Magsaysay promised to grant him a full

pardon from the president (Official Gazette, 1952). President Elpidio Quirino directed him to relocate to an island off Jolo (Canberra Times, 1955), reportedly Tawi-Tawi, as he and his twenty followers had been granted public land totaling 5,000 hectares. However, they chose not to pursue this option for various reasons (American Chamber of Commerce, 1956). Shortly after returning to Jolo, he again clashed with the government (Canberra Times, 1955) for failing to fulfill its promise of clemency, a full pardon from the president (Official Gazette, 1952).

Tan (1977) noted that Maas Kamlon, a devout Muslim whose ancestors had long resisted Western colonizers, led a group that fought the government for three years. According to the Canberra Times (1955), Kamlon appeared in Jolo on September 25, 1955. However, reports state that a day earlier, on September 24, 1955, he had already “surrendered” to the Armed Forces, which they described as his final surrender (McKenna, 2024), as shown in Figure 6. This came after a long and costly military campaign, where 190 of his followers were killed, 48 were wounded, and 82 were captured (American Chamber of Commerce, 1956).

Figure 6

Maas Kamlon in 1954 (Source: McKenna, 2024)



Negotiations with Maas Kamlon led to Education

At the beginning of 1951, signs of alienation, agitation, disquiet, and revolt began to appear in the Sulu Archipelago. As Yegar (2002, p. 243) mentioned, Maas Kamlon led a revolt in Jolo, Sulu Archipelago, involving 100 to 300 people, which lasted for years. However, during a meeting with Ramon Magsaysay on July 31, 1952, Maas Kamlon expressed frustration with the government. Conceivably, it broke out because of conflicts between local leaders, perhaps a revolt against foreign rule since the Philippine government was perceived by many Muslims in the south as a foreign Christian government that endangered the Muslims’ traditional way of life, culture, and aspirations. As a result, as reported by Asani (1985, p. 310), many lives were lost, numerous homes were destroyed, and a large portion of the population was displaced. This was supported by Informant A:

He saw the government as foreign to him and accused them of charging him with a crime in his own hula (place) and bangsa (community) and against his own agama (beliefs) in his defense. Due to his limited knowledge of the legal system, he needed help understanding the legal proceedings.

Also, as Tan (1977) supported, Maas Kamlon opposed the government's replacement of Islamic and *adat* (local custom-based) *agama* courts with Christian and Western court systems, which contradicted his beliefs and practices. As stated by Hirtz (2003), it is crucial to recognize the identity of the Indigenous people, particularly the Muslims in Sulu, including their diverse norms, lifestyles, and practices, and to ensure that these are duly recognized, respected, and legally protected. The Sulus, like Maas Kamlon, affirm their Muslim identity and prioritize Islam's significance (Tan, 1977), actively adhering to Shariah law and upholding *adat* (custom) as a fundamental law that guides their daily lives and problem-solving methods (Danial, Amat, & Dino, 2024).

As reported by Time (1952), Maas Kamlon was asked what the government could do to stop his fighting, and the discussion turned to the pressing issues facing the Sulu Archipelago, with education a prominent topic. He then emphasized the need for improved educational opportunities, highlighting the significance of education as a cornerstone for development and progress. This pivotal moment highlighted the mutual aspiration to uplift the community through knowledge and learning, which led to the creation of an academic institution. These narratives are supported by Informant A:

Wayiruan siya nagdemand siyn, wayiruan siya nagdemand kawasa, ampa hirihil kaniya yadtu misan unu. Amu yadtu in kasabunnalan niya. Amura yadtu in demand sin illiterate man laung, magiskul, education. In anak hi Basaron amun anak niya magulang bang paamuhun paiskulun niya mataas, sagawa nakapag-general. Duwa ra in anak niya. Hi Basaron iban Adilon. Liyangug siya hi Magsaysay. Bang ma katu na pagkamarayaw na kita, na paghadji na kaw. Waktu yadtu hi Quirino in President hi Magsaysay in Secretary of National Defense. Amuin na jail na siya hi Magsaysay na in nagpresident.

TRANSLATION]

He neither demanded money nor power, but whatever his demand was, it would indeed be granted. The truth is, this illiterate man only wanted an education. Basaron, his son, was supposed to attend higher education but became a general. The man only has two sons, Basaron and Adilon. Magsaysay told him that since he was now friends with the government, he should go on a pilgrimage. At the time, Quirino was president, and Magsaysay served as Secretary of National Defense. Magsaysay became president while he was in jail.

Following a significant event, Maas Kamlon returned to the hills after a week and voiced strong criticism of the government's incompetence. In response, Magsaysay accused him of deceit and advocated for a more assertive stance. Since the authorities launched "Operation Durian" on August 22, 1952, there were implications regarding Maas Kamlon's severe injury or possible death, supported by the discovery of purported artifacts: a *barung*⁵, a leather bag riddled with bullet holes, a Quran, gold coins, letters from Secretary Magsaysay, Secretary Castelo, and Maj. Gen. Calixto Duque, along with clothing belonging to Maas Kamlon's wife and son (Tan, 1977). Contrary to initial reports, Maas Kamlon surprised many by "surrendering" to Col. Florentino Cardenas on November 10, 1952. Subsequently, Judge Zulueta sentenced him and 18 of his followers to life imprisonment aboard the PN LST 842 in Capual Channel on November 27, 1952, as detailed by Tan (1977).

The government, on the advice of General Duque and based on the parole proposal by Maas Kamlon, paroled Maas Kamlon and his followers and allocated them about 12,000 hectares of land in Tawi-Tawi on December 2, 1952 (Tan, 1977). Maas Kamlon, however, was re-engaged in legal tussles in 1953, when he was reported to have breached his parole, a claim he denied, citing the government's failure to meet its obligations under the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) Settlement (Tan, 1977). Increased military operations in 1954, among which was the mobilization of the Sulu Air Task Group (SATAG), which joined the Jolo Task Force (JOTAF) on November 19, 1954, led Maas Kamlon on December 14, 1954, to submit his offer to surrender to the Special Muslim Committee of the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, the enmity continued until September 24, 1955, when he

⁵A leaf-shaped blade, sometimes referred to as a *pakukus*, is a heavy-bladed sword that typically measures between eight and twenty-two inches in length and three inches in width.

handed over his carbine to Colonel Borromeo on a yacht off Tandu Panuan, Luuk (Tan, 1977).

It resulted in secret talks mediated by the Undersecretary Jose M. Crisol and facilitated by Sulu Governor Arolas Tulawie, which took place outside Jolo within the military command structure. The negotiations were not conditional, as they ensured a fair trial and led to a partial loss of Maas Kamlon's followers due to war fatigue, in addition to the promise of compensation. The government then gave P20,000: P10,000 to the defense counsel of Maas Kamlon, P5,000 to his wife, children, and P5,000 to the negotiators (Tan, 1977). However, Maas Kamlon appealed against his first conviction and life sentence, claiming that he would surrender only on the condition that parole be granted to him. The government insisted that a partial pardon only would be issued and that Maas Kamlon had breached the terms of his pardon, which required frequent monthly reporting to the Philippine Constabulary, assistance in surrendering firearms, and having his case regularly supervised by authorities (Supreme Court Decisions, 1963).

While Maas Kamlon was confined to a death row cell in Muntinlupa, Professor Nur Misuari advocated for his release (Tan, 1977). In an interview with Tom Stern, Misuari recounted that the initial step in this endeavor was to reach out to the Sulu Sultan, who had abdicated his throne, and to enlist Congressman Sultan Amilbanga to gather information about Maas Kamlon. During this time, the former Defense Secretary Alejo Santos, appointed by President Magsaysay, served as the prison superintendent. Upon meeting Maas Kamlon, who was clad in an orange jumpsuit, Misuari learned that Maas Kamlon's family was amassing arms in preparation for a renewed conflict should he perish in prison (Stern, 2012). Despite the significant toll the uprising took on both factions, Maas Kamlon earned the respect of surviving freedom fighters and future revolutionaries, becoming recognized as a pioneer in the fight for liberation and independence in MinSuPala. Ultimately, as shown in Figure 7, Ferdinand Marcos granted him a full pardon on September 11, 1968 (Stern, 2017; Tan, 1967).

Figure 7

In the 1960s, Maas Kamlon Shakes Hands with President Ferdinand Marcos After His Release and for His Full Pardon (Source: McKenna, 1999)



Hadji Kamlon being received by President Marcos in Malacañang

From Resistance to Academic Institution: The Creation of Mindanao State University as a Nexus of Resistance, Negotiation, and Nation-Building

In her comment on social media on May 7, 2023, during the discussion about Maas Kamlon's resistance to the establishment of the university, the granddaughter of the former Muslim senator said, "It was the Kamlon Rebellion that propelled Muslim legislators to formulate solutions to the quagmire of peace, and Senator Ahmad Domocao A. Alonto, then-congressman, put out the bill that created Mindanao State University."

The first discussion that led to the creation of Mindanao State University began when Maas Kamlon was aboard a Navy boat in Manila with his wife and father in August 1952 to have an audience with Elpidio Quirino. Maas Kamlon said he was uneducated and needed more knowledge when asked why he fought the government. Then, he requested that his children and their children receive a free education (Informant A, personal communication, January 14, 2024).

Ramon Magsaysay arrived at Lahing-Lahing, where Maas Kamlon was aboard a navy vessel. The government instructed him to relinquish his traditional bladed weapon, the *barung*, yet Maas Kamlon remained steadfast in his refusal to comply with any attempts at coercion. Upon disembarking, Informant A's maternal grandfather was present during the meeting, as shown in Figure 8.

In discussions with Magsaysay, Maas Kamlon emphasized the importance of his children's education, framing it as essential for their future advancement. Magsaysay also extended the offer for Maas Kamlon to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca. Major Ajidin Bahjin, then a captain, acted as interpreter, conveying Maas Kamlon's unfamiliarity with government procedures and his reluctance to confront state authorities (Dino et al., 2022; Informant A, personal communication, January 14, 2024). Despite this engagement, renewed hostilities erupted two weeks later, when the government deployed naval and aerial forces to bombard Tandu Niangkaan, resulting in significant casualties. This put pressure on Maas Kamlon from his relatives, who reported that many had died. Finally, he "surrendered" for the third time, marking the first time the term "surrender" was broached, which led to his imprisonment and subsequent sentencing. During the final negotiation, Maas Arolas Tulawie served as the government's emissary, accompanying Maas Kamlon through the arduous process. It was during Maas Kamlon's third "surrender" to the government that followed the establishment of the university, Informant A stated:

Tagna pa pagbissara nila iban labi na nakasakat siya pa taas naval iban nakaagad na siya pa Manila. Sagawa wayi siya nakapaMalakanyang. Amura in asawa niya iban ama niya Apu Haji yadtu in nakapaMalakanyang, kan Quirino sin August 1952. In agi niya 'in aku ini wayi pangadji, iban kulang in pamaham ku, hangkanna aku nakaatu ha parinta.' Pagubus nagrequest siya paiskulun in anakapu niya libri, amun wayi bayad. Biya tuud hadtu in word niya, libri. So daindidtu na nagtagna.

[TRANSLATION]

The start of their discussion was when he was in the naval boat and when he joined the group to go to Manila. But he did not join to go to Malacañang. Only his wife and his father, Apu Haji, went to Malacañang to see Elpidio Quirino in August 1952. He said, 'I am uneducated and know less why I fought the government.' After that, he requested that his children and their children be educated for free, with no pay. His word was like that: free. So that is where it started.

Figure 8

Maas Kamlon was on Board Philippine Naval Boat 1133 in July 1952 during a Peace Negotiation with National Defense Secretary Ramon F. Magsaysay and Captain Ajidin Bahjin (Source: Philippine Marine Corps, 1952)



During the operation targeting Maas Kamlon, numerous casualties were reported. When a request was made for him to visit Quirino, several senators objected to allowing a known perpetrator into Malacañang. Nonetheless, Maas Kamlon's wife and father paid a visit to Malacañang, a move that stirred significant controversy despite attempts by the government to minimize its impact. Maas Kamlon sought educational opportunities for his children, voicing his bewilderment at the government's actions. Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa was present in the area at the time, as Maas Kamlon remained resolute in his position. Informant A described:

Nagoppose magtuy in manga Senator, "mayta in mamatay tau pasurun pa Malakanyang." Na in baran niya wayi nakasud, amura in asawa niya in nakasud madtu iban sin ama niya. Wayina yadtu piyalaggu sin parinta iban controversial in issue yadtu, sabab sin mataud in napatay ha waktu yadtu, hangkanda yadtu bihadtu. Bihadtu in bissara niya "paikulin in anakapu ku sabab sin kulang in pamaham ku hangkanna aku nakaatu ha parinta." Ha waktu yadtu daing ha hula in congressman, hi Sultan Ombra Amilbangsa. Iban ha waktu yadtu consistent in Maas Kamlon sin cause niya (Ynawat, 2024).

[TRANSLATION]

Senators opposed. "Why did a killer enter Malacañang?" But he did not enter, only his wife and father. However, the government did not highlight the issue because it was controversial. He said, 'Just educate my children because I have less knowledge about why I fight the government.' Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa was in town then, and Maas Kamlon was consistent with his cause (Informant A, personal communication, January 14, 2024).

Maas Kamlon's defiance confounded the government. Despite the government's superior military force and enticing rewards, he evaded capture, even with fewer followers and less sophisticated

weapons. The prolonged struggle to subdue around 100 lightly armed insurgents on the small island of Jolo raised questions about the underlying cause of Maas Kamlon's rebellion. Consequently, the government decided to investigate the root causes of the unrest. A Special House Committee was established, comprising three legislators from Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, namely Hon. Domocao Alonto, a senator from Lanao who served as chairman, Hon. Luminog Mangelen, a congressman from Cotabato, and Hon. Ombra Amilbanga, a congressman from Sulu (Caballero, 2013; Jubair, 1999; Marohombsalic, 2001).

The Alonto Congressional Committee, after investigating him in 1954, found that the long-term resistance of Maas Kamlon was not due to military inability or mystical faith but, on the contrary, to common beliefs that the Philippine military and, by extension, the state, was alien and not representative of the Muslims. The Committee reiterated that the solution to what has since been called the Mindanao Problem was to be a meaningful integration, as opposed to an assimilation of the Muslims into the Philippine nation, and suggested a holistic reform (social, political, moral, economic, and educational) to the situation (Caballero, 2013). Such recommendations were used in the further state strategies, such as Mindanao State University (MSU) being approved in 1955, its formal establishment in 1961, and the establishment of the Commission on National Integration in 1957, which made education a major national integration route (Caballero, 2013; RA 1387; Yegar, 2002, p. 242).

In this context, the negotiated peace came to be based on education after the conditional surrender of Maas Kamlon. Not having an official secular education, but knowledgeable on Islamic education and local traditions, Maas Kamlon reportedly endorsed the vision of a school by President Magsaysay, which would empower the Muslim and Indigenous youth, ensuring that the school would not interfere with their cultural and religious identities (Alonto Committee Report, 1954; Caballero, 2013; RA 1387; Matula interview in PNA, 2020). It is based on this that the MSU System was not only envisioned as a secular academic center but also as a platform for transformation in nation-building. Although it has a secular curriculum, statutory requirements ensure cultural preservation through programs like the compulsory History 3 course on Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan; and institutions like the Aga Khan Museum of Islamic Arts and the Aga Khan Center of Islamic Studies. These projects transform the acknowledgment of Muslim and Lumad knowledge systems, as well as dominant national narratives (Caballero, 2013; Madale, 1997; Rodil, 1994).

This vision of the institution is consistent with the theory of transformational leadership developed by Burns (1978) that predicts the formation of moral purpose and collective identity. MSU therefore serves as an instrument of academic intra-movement as well as a protector of Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan culture in direct response to the structural disparities found in the post-Kamlon negotiations.

According to local leaders A and B who were informants of this research, MSU continues to serve as a bridge, empowering the youth while honoring the aspirations of elders like Maas Kamlon, who resisted marginalization not with isolation but through principled negotiation for meaningful inclusion. They showed that this approach strengthened community ties.

Nagsurbi sila ha Lupah Sug, naglawag lugal marayaw, misan kulang in lupa pagpatindugan sin iskul. Duwa in hula, Bud datu iban Bud Pula, Anuling in nilay pagbutangan.

TRANSLATION]

A survey was conducted in Jolo, Sulu, to find a suitable location for an academic institution, given the limited availability of land for the school. Two areas, Bud datu and Bud Pula Anuling, were evaluated.

Early resistance to the creation of the institution, according to the Informants A and B, was based more on a lack of land and potential donors. These restrictions prompted the decision to locate the main campus in Marawi, a city that was once a military reserve. Later on, the Sulu Archipelago was granted a campus in the form of MSU Sulu College of Technology and Oceanography by Republic Act No. 6060, sponsored by Congressman Atty. Indanan Anni.

According to Burns (1978, p. 426), transformational leadership is described as a moral and motivational process by which the leaders and the followers uplift each other to greater heights of purpose and ethical dedication. This model throws light on the most important aspects of leadership, especially how Maas Kamlon relates to his followers and how he upholds moral values such as responsibility, fairness, and keeping promises. His power was grounded in local traditions of indigenous leadership, called *pagtaumaas* (Danial et al., 2024), and the values embedded in it were traditional and aligned with transformational leadership. As a leader, Maas Kamlon rose to become a force of resistance against the Japanese and the post-war Philippine government, despite his humble origins as a farmer. The idea of founding an educational institution was an act of morality and a strategic choice of the kind of education that could empower future generations and soften the effects of marginalization.

Even though Maas Kamlon frequently depicted himself as lacking education, he was an intellectually disciplined person, having thoroughly studied the Holy Quran and having studied Islamic and Sulus traditions. This academic background helped him become a well-respected community leader who valued education and experience. In addition to his reputation as a resistance leader, he was recalled as a father, husband, and community leader who used an inclusive leadership approach by taking care of the personal needs of his subjects. His promotion of education, especially in his discussions with government authorities, highlighted his long-term interest in the social mobility and welfare of his community.

One of the most essential, yet most often neglected, points of leadership of Maas Kamlon was that he shifted his path from armed resistance to political negotiation and structural change. His initial interactions with the state were marked by military conflict. However, subsequent interactions with national officials, particularly with Ramon Magsaysay, were characterized by a pragmatic decision to engage in due. The results of the 1954 Congressional Inquiry indicated that he was not acting against extremism or adventurism but due to a disillusionment that he felt with his state, which he considered to be an outsider and not representative of the Muslim communities (Alonto Committee Report, 1954).

In this regard, education became an important source of negotiation. Although Maas Kamlon never received a formal secular education, his strong background in both Islamic and local traditions guided his willingness to engage with the state and to endorse an educational institution as one of the methods of inclusion. This was institutionalized with the creation of Mindanao State University in 1961 under Republic Act No. 1387, which was a social laboratory of national integration. In one of the 9th Regular Turnover Ceremonies on July 04, 2025, MSU System President Atty. Paisalin Tago underlined that the establishment of MSU was a reaction to the Maas Kamlon rebellion, with the backing of Senator Ahmad Domocao Alonto. He also pointed out that the demand for education, as voiced by Maas Kamlon, led to the establishment of the Commission on National Integration and formed the foundation of political institutions that would follow later, such as the ARMM and BARMM.

However, these assertions should be substantiated rather than symbolically interpreted. The present research, therefore, highlights the necessity of examining how the negotiations Maas Kamlon had were reflected in the recommendations of the Alonto Committee and how they were translated

into legal and institutional terms (Alonto et al., 1954; Caballero, 2013; Philippine News Agency, 2020). Based on archival documentation, legal aspects, and community stories, the analysis of Maas Kamlon as a transformational leader is analytically solid and well-grounded in history, rather than commemorative.

This showcases his willingness to adapt and pursue nonviolent means to achieve his goals. The eventual establishment of Mindanao State University reflects Maas Kamlon's capacity for innovation and collaboration. Maas Kamlon's thoughts on education included partnering with government officials to create a new academic institution; he was willing to work within existing structures to bring about change. This innovative approach to conflict resolution and nation-building highlights his transformative leadership style. The added response, an email from Informant C on July 08, 2024, supported this conflict-resolution and nation-building narrative. The informant's encounter in 2010 with Kah Hj Adilun, who happened to marry the cousin, during an eight-hour boat trip from Jolo to Zamboanga. The following e-mail states:

Apu Kamlon was legendary; my grandmother narrated stories of his rebellion and his surrender to the authorities. However, I really could not believe the tale of the failed electric chair that refused to end his life. While researching at MSU Marawi, I talked with activists who talked about Apu Kamlon and the electric chair. I thought they were only making jokes, so I dismissed the discussions. Our research on the history of Muslims in the Philippines made us better understand him. He was the main content of the Alonto Report in the archives of the Philippine Congress, which led to the creation of the University and the Commission on National Integration (CNI), which also granted scholarships.

So, Apu Kamlon had a tangible legacy he may not have known. It is not just the malfunctioned electric chair; it is something that benefitted most young people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who had studied at the university and elsewhere.

The interaction between leaders and followers has historically catalyzed significant societal change through transformative leadership. While the Sulu Sultanate historically sought to preserve autonomy and sovereignty, Maas Kamlon mobilized his followers around a vision of reclaiming land rights, challenging Philippine authority, and restoring the Sultanate's waning influence. Both forms of leadership exerted transformative effects, fostering unity and solidarity across diverse ethnic groups and rallying them against shared colonial and state adversaries (Burns, 1978). Through charismatic leadership, Maas Kamlon sustained prolonged resistance, challenged prevailing narratives, and inspired innovative thinking among his followers.

Maas Kamlon's movements also stimulated critical reflection on governance, justice, and sovereignty, engaging communities in dialogue regarding their political and social realities. Operating across multiple contexts and time periods, he prioritized the well-being of his constituents, whether resisting colonial encroachment or seeking redress for land disputes. His transformative leadership instilled trust and confidence among followers, grounded in principles of justice, self-determination, and cultural sovereignty, even when armed resistance was employed. Despite facing formidable adversaries, Maas Kamlon maintained a steadfast commitment to his objectives, earning the respect and loyalty of his followers.

Conversely, Philippine leaders such as Colonel Garcia and Defense Secretary Magsaysay pursued a vision of restoring peace and order in the Sulu Archipelago. By addressing the structural challenges of banditry and lawlessness, they inspired their troops with a sense of purpose and urgency. The briefing officers' warnings regarding operational hazards reinforced discipline, vigilance, and commitment among soldiers. Military leaders displayed strategic acumen, adapting to the unconventional tactics of Maas Kamlon's guerrilla forces, while remaining attentive to the physical and psychological well-

being of their personnel, as documented in Manubay's (1993) account.

Maas Kamlon's eventual "surrender" and subsequent appeals for clemency further illustrate his concern for the welfare of his followers, albeit expressed differently from that of the government forces, as shown in Figure 9. Likewise, Garcia, Magsaysay, and their officers led by example, demonstrating courage and resolve that cultivated loyalty and commitment among their troops. Maas Kamlon's capitulation marked a pivotal moment in the transition toward peace and reconciliation in the Sulu Archipelago. Yet, his repeated returns to insurgency highlight the challenges inherent in transformative change, reflecting the cyclical nature of conflict. His frustration with state authorities stemmed from a perception that Philippine legal and governance systems were foreign and incompatible with local beliefs and customs, emphasizing the necessity of situating leadership within its cultural and historical context.

Figure 9

Maas Kamlon, Dressed in Black, was at the Center in Luuk Following his Negotiation in 1955
(Source: Tawasil, 2023)



Maas Kamlon exemplified a commitment to positive societal change by advocating for education for his children and future generations, reflecting Burns' (1978, pp. 19–20) notion of transformative leadership in reshaping followers' values, needs, aspirations, and goals. Despite initial resistance and conflict, he engaged in negotiations with government officials, including Ramon Magsaysay, demonstrating a willingness to pursue dialogue and reconciliation. Magsaysay's offer to sponsor Maas Kamlon's pilgrimage to Mecca can be interpreted as a gesture that fosters peace and facilitates a shift toward shared understanding. Through these interactions, common ground was established,

and underlying grievances were addressed, embodying Burns' principle of challenging unjust systems while advancing the well-being of marginalized communities.

The founding of Mindanao State University, inspired by Maas Kamlon's advocacy, represents a transformative initiative to address systemic inequalities and expand educational access for the historically marginalized Muslim population (Burns, 1978, p. 40). The subsequent recommendations of the Special House Committee, along with the creation of programs and agencies to promote Muslim integration into the national framework, exemplify a commitment to inclusive and participatory governance. This approach aligns with Burns' (1978, pp. 425–426) emphasis on achieving sustainable, systemic change by shaping the motives, goals, and values of stakeholders to pursue higher collective objectives.

Conclusion

This research presents the historic figure, Maas Kamlon, in the Sulu Archipelago and how resistance was developed into a transformative leadership style. It employs a qualitative approach to history, in which the interaction of historical, cultural, and political dynamics shaped the resistance of Maas Kamlon, who based his resistance on personal grievances, cultural identity, and a desire for greater autonomy and self-determination. One of the main conclusions is that his opposition evolved into a regional struggle and then into a nationwide struggle that openly challenged the state's authority. By mobilizing his followers, his charismatic leadership emphasizes his leadership style and strategy.

Moreover, this research emphasizes the lives of the two groups of the followers of Maas Kamlon and the troops of the government. His followers were very loyal and were widely perceived as disciplined warriors who used conventional weapons like *kris* and *barong*, and were often seen as willing to sacrifice for the cause. The situation was different with government soldiers who had to endure long and grueling battles characterized by ambushes, protracted gun battles, and even contracting diseases. The consequences of these conditions were severe physical and psychological stress, and long-term mental health effects in some of the soldiers.

In addition to armed struggle, the results highlight Maas Kamlon's prospective vision, his devotion to education, his personal interest in his people, and his ability to negotiate at the political level. His interaction with government officials, especially his negotiations with Ramon Magsaysay, marked a key milestone, shifting the confrontation to dialogue. The further dissemination of education and the later establishment of Mindanao State University explain the institutional permanence of this negotiated change. This research contributes to the scholarship in several ways. First, it questions prevailing historical accounts that peripheralize or distort representations of Muslim resistance, preempting local thinking and oral histories. Second, it enhances understanding of the political processes behind the fights for autonomy and self-determination in conflict-affected areas, and of education as an instrumental response to structural exclusion in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Lastly, the results explain the social importance of a collective-identity-based, ethically-committed, and community-involved leadership and how it influences individual agency and collective behavior.

Maas Kamlon has a legacy that provides valuable lessons to modern governance and educational reform in marginalized and conflict-prone environments. His shift to non-violent change by negotiation is an example of the relevance of culture-responsive governance and democratic development. His experience offers a model of transformational leadership that embraces local realities in places where historical marginalization, limited education, and governance issues persist.

The creation of Mindanao State University as a peace-building project is another example of how

state institutions can be reinvented through dialogue rather than coercion. Maas Kamlon's approach highlights the necessity for policymakers to work with grassroots voices and cultural histories, and to work towards structural changes that support equity and inclusion. His legacy can be used to shape the current models of inclusive governance, conflict management, and educational reforms by integrating this narrative into history, governance, and education curricula, and especially in the discourse on nation-building, postcolonial reconciliation, and educational justice.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

We declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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