Out of the Shadows?
Violence and perceptions of power in Muslim Mindanao

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I

Brief background
The Republic of the Philippines
Population: 102 mln (2016 est)
Area: 300,000 km²
92% Christian, 6% Muslim, 2% Indigenous
GDP p/c: $1,673 (2013 est)

Mindanao
Population: 22 mln (2010 census)
Area: 104,530 km²
70% Christian, 20% Muslim, 10% Indigenous
GDP p/c: $1,118 (2013 est)

Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
Population: 3.2 mln (2010 census)
Area: 26,974 km²
90% Muslim, 8% Christian, 2% Indigenous
GDP p/c: $354 (2013 est)
Philippines Poverty Incidence Among Families by Region, 2012

Data Source:
Brief Conflict Chronology in Muslim Mindanao

1578-1898 Intermittent Spanish-Moro wars
1903-1939 Muslim land confiscation laws enacted by Philippine Insular US Government/US protectorate
1913-1960s Christian in-migration and establishment of agricultural colonies
1968 Jabidah massacre of Muslim Filipino soldiers allegedly by the Philippine army
1969 (circa) Formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and start of civil war in Muslim Mindanao
1984 Formal separation of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from MNLF
1996 Establishment of Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and formal end of hostilities between MNLF and the Philippine state
2009 Ampatuan massacre, 58 civilians including 32 media workers killed in election-related violence in ARMM
2012/2014 Framework Agreement / Comprehensive Peace Agreement on the Bangsamoro and formal end of GRP-MILF hostilities
2013 Siege of Zamboanga
2015 Mamasapano massacre of 44 Philippine special police troops by MILF forces during anti-terrorist operation in ARMM
**Cost of War**

**Economic Loss (in Philippine Peso)**
- 20 billion per year or
- 640 billion from 1970 to 2001

**Human Casualties**
- Nearly 120,000 people killed between 1970-1996
- MNLF: 50%
- AFP: 30%
- Civilians: 20%

**Social Welfare Disruption**
- Internally Displaced Persons Statistics
  - 982,000 (2000 All-out-War)
  - 600,000 (2008 MOA-AD failure)

**Disruptions**
- Cycle of violence and injustice
- Disruption of development efforts (multigenerational setbacks)
- Destruction of the environment
- Poor sense of wellbeing and security

**Sources:**
II

The nature of the puzzle to be explained
Pieces of a Puzzle

Research into the links between power and violence in Muslim Mindanao (MM) is complicated by lack of systematic records, widespread informal practices, sensitivity of the topic, and a culture of silence.

A coherent account thereof needs to be historically informed and keep track of possibly contradictory meanings of power.

*There is no universal definition of social power, neither in the academy nor in social practice.*
MM is known for extraordinary levels of violence and weak presence of the state

Meanwhile, most large-scale violence has been perpetrated by or against state(-affiliated) actors

*Power appears to both fragment and institutionalise the occurrence of violence*
Pieces of a Puzzle

Of the cited 120,000 casualties of the Moro conflict since the 1970s, Torres et.al. (2007, p16) relate around 5,500 deaths (4.6%) to clan fighting.

In Kreuzer's (2011, I) estimate, clan-related fighting is responsible for up to half of all the said fatalities (except the 1970s open warfare).

*The way we perceive the patterns of violence greatly influences our estimates and proposed solutions*
Conceiving violent power in Muslim Mindanao
Mapping Social Power

For multi-disciplinary research of power, one avenue is suggested by the historical sociology of Michael Mann. In his IMEP framework, power is institutionalised through four overlapping, yet autonomous social networks of ideological, military, economic and political power. Combined with local fieldwork, the IMEP frame offers a rich vista into the multiple meanings of social power, as it relates to violence.
Violent Ideologies

Ideological power: ideas, ideals, identity, norms, culture, religion; "control over meanings, morals and rituals in society" (Mann 2005)

➢ Moro vs Christian, clan vs clan identity
➢ Primacy of local norms
➢ Unresolved question of Islam's relationship to the Philippine state
➢ Invocation of cultural differences as causes for separatism / domination
Violent Economics

Economic power: control over capital and material resources, means of production, wealth distribution, class relations

➢ Dispossession of Muslim ancestral lands and livelihoods
➢ High disparities in wealth and human capital
➢ Massive poverty, lowest HDI in the country
➢ Informal economy involving 83% of ARMM people
➢ Shadow economy of weapons, drugs, kidnap for ransom, illegal lands and smuggled goods
Violent Politics

Political power: territorialisation, centralisation, administration, state building, institutions, demographics, governance, state services

➢ Settler colonialism
➢ Little state penetration
➢ Lacking public services
➢ Muslim under-representation nationally; dysfunctional regional autonomy
➢ Bad governance, misuse and starvation of state funds
Military Violence

Military power: use of "concentrated lethal violence" in a society" (Mann 2005, 351), not restricted to the state

➢ History of colonial and clan warfare
➢ Heavy militarisation since the 1970s
➢ Widespread access to, and ownership of, firearms
➢ Militarisation of political processes ('warlordism')
➢ Connections to transnational criminal and terrorist networks
Fragmentary Institutions

Despite the varying social patterns associated with violence in MM, two common denominators stand out:

➢ Fragmentation
➢ Polarisation

Polarising and fragmenting tendencies work directly against efforts to build peace – and the state
IV

Violent incidents,
Fieldwork impressions
Fieldwork Overview

Location: Cotabato City, Maguindanao, North Cotabato

Time: two months in 2015 (several visits)

Interviewees: local politicians (provincial, municipal, barangay), security sector (AFP, PNP, CAFGU), ex-rebels (MILF officers), academics, peace activists, civil society organisations

Method: in-depth semistrucured interviews, focus group discussions (largely in English)
Two Notorious Massacres

➢ In Ampatuan, November 23rd 2009, 58 people (mostly women and including 32 journalists) were killed as they intended to nominate an opposition candidate for elections

➢ In Mamasapano, January 25th 2015, 44 PNP SAF operatives, 18 MILF/BIFF members and up to 7 civilians were killed in a clash resulting from an anti-terrorist operation by the PNP
Ideological Aspect

➢ Very high civilian trust of the AFP in the region according to local commanding officers – flatly contradicted by many Moros I spoke with

➢ "As Bangsamoro we see all Muslim rebel groups as protectors of the Moro people, with the AFP we're yet to see that" (Ismael Maulana of CBCS, RRUC)

➢ Overwhelming support for the BBL in Maguindanao (over 90%)

➢ "When you go back to America, say we don't need BBL!" (high-ranking Christian politician from North Cotabato)
Ideological Aspect

➢ Clan, tribal, religious and Moro identities and norms clearly resonate more with locals than those of the Philippine state

➢ While deplorable, violence is still seen as acceptable, if not necessary social conduct for restoring honour (*maratabat*)

➢ Both massacres were preceded by clear infringement of the local norm of territoriality
Economic Aspect

➢ Persistent conflict has long hampered development creating a vicious circle that cannot be broken through economic means alone (i.e. low risk-adjusted return on investment)

➢ Due to economic dire straits, recruitment is easy for the rough and dangerous life of armed groups

➢ Local shadow economy blurs the line between violent and non-violent activities
Economic Aspect

➢ IRA in Maguindanao is around a thousand times bigger than local tax revenue, as nearly all 'visible' money in the region comes from Manila

➢ "No IRA, no rido" (local NGO worker)

➢ "It is not public service that motivates /--/ seek[ing] office. In truth, what are up for grabs are not the political positions per se but the IRA and other public funds that come with the office /--/ [for] expanding the power of the local executive[s] through various methods such as political horse-trading, as well as sustaining and arming their private arm[ies]" (MPG, p12)
Political Aspect

- Political power highly concentrated in the local executive (may wield all four IMEP sources to an extent)
- High number of municipalities created as an act of political 'power projection' (local NGO worker)
- State penetration much weaker than appears on paper (i.e. double system of reported and actual reality)
- Personalistic governance based on staunch factional loyalties
Political Aspect

- Elections traditionally rigged every step of the process (MPG, pp14-15), winners largely determined by money and informal agreement.
- In 2008, 86% of people in Maguindanao favoured uncontested elections (SWS in Arguillas 2011).
- Informal norms play key role in political conduct and competition.
- Local security coordination dependent on influential personalities.
Military Aspect

➢ A warzone for decades, power in MM grows out of the barrel of the gun (local scholar)

➢ In line with the 'war on terror', AFP fights groups challenging the state, yet on the ground many shades of grey prevail ('civilians being reserve forces of the rebels')

➢ Armed factions linked directly with the Mamasapano massacre include MILF, BIFF, Jemaah Islamiyah (linked with al-Qaeda), PNP SAF, AFP

➢ Local violence is not about any single armed group, it's about the culture of violence linking them (Col. Hermoso)
Military Aspect

➢ Local warlords fear only the AFP, as they've got bigger guns

➢ Ampatuans, with Arroyo's backing, could coopt the entire local security apparatus, including parts the AFP

➢ Fall of the Ampatuans created a security vacuum leading to skyrocketing crime and possibly the Mamasapano clash (local officials)

➢ 'Before we used to have one king, now everyone thinks they're one' (Ismael Maulana)
Ethnographic Aspect

➢ "[T]he Datu System /--/ underlies the Sultanate Institution that persists to this day in the form of Warlordism" (MPG, 3)

➢ Power over life and death in a warlord's domain is not to be contested in the 'crocodile's lair' (MPG, 7)

➢ A readiness to violence a long-standing, pivotal attribute of leadership in MM (Kreuzer 2011)

➢ 'You think you can be leader here if you're not prepared to kill? If you're a soft leader no one will respect you' (local official)
Ways towards peace
Civil Society Engagement

- Local CSO engagement in security processes an important unacknowledged outcome of the Amapatuan massacre
- The whole state sector had been compromised, so CSOs input provided long-needed change
- Bantay Bayanihan and Good Wednesday Group for Peace important precedent and first step
- Challenge is institutionalisation and funding of such quasi-state solutions
Local Knowledge

➢ Local knowledge a crucial unappreciated facet of violence mitigation

➢ Lt. Gen Ferrer's bloodless management of Ampatuan aftermath a constructive example of practical peacebuilding

➢ Mamasapano violence triggered directly because of ignorance of local norms

➢ Challenge is benefiting from local knowledge while ensuring institutional compliance
Institution Building

➢ The overriding challenge is establishment of workable institutions, or *common rules of the game*

➢ "We only have one problem in Mindanao – we don't have a state" (local councillor)

➢ To design working institutions in MM, important to incorporate local knowledge and ensure local civil society has meaningful role in them
Selected References


Kreuzer, Peter (2011) "Violence as a Means of Control and Domination in the Southern Philippines" Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, PRIF Report No. 105

Shukran!

Q & A?