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Terror as a Social Movement Tactic: Applying the Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to the Case of the Abu Sayyaf Group

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to the Case of the Abu Sayyaf Group

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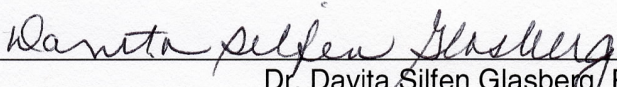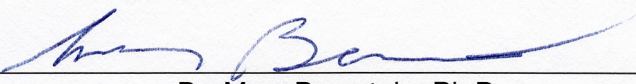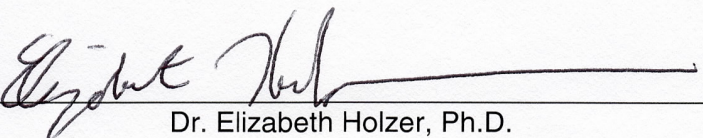APPROVAL PAGE

Masters of Arts Thesis

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to the Case of the Abu Sayyaf Group

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ABSTRACT

Solely equating terrorism with criminality discounts the social, political, cultural, and historical motivations that drive people to employ violence as a strategy for collective action. Using the multi-institutional politics approach to social movements (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008), this study explores the choice of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines to employ terror and violence as the primary social movement tactic to pursue their Islamic separatist cause. Analysis of archival and open-source data, together with original interviews, reveal that the problem is multi-institutional – developmental, cultural, historical, social and political all at the same time. The choice of violence results from a distinctive combination of context-specific conditions rather than from pure fundamentalist ideology or political opportunities. The culture of "warlordism," history of Muslim oppression, weak governance and law enforcement, and the lack of economic opportunities in the southern Philippines, has largely directed the strategy of the ASG over time. Specific tactics of kidnap for ransom, extortion, and small-scale (non-suicide) bombings currently point to a wavering and superficial Islamic fundamentalist ideological indoctrination among its members and supporters. Strategic choices thus depend on the struggle for material and symbolic power in Mindanao. This suggests that the tactics of the ASG arise not from purely political or secessionist motivations, but rather emerge as a consequence of a multi-layered structure of dominance, and a complex power struggle in Mindanao. Consequently, a purely militaristic approach to eliminate the ASG that disregards the multi-institutional nature of the problem will simply be a cause of perennial frustration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Sofia –
so that your world may be one of understanding and hope.

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PART I.
THE STUDY

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION
The Social Problem and the Research Question

Political pundits, the media, and scholars alike often portray individuals or groups that engage in terrorism[1] as either hardened criminals or rogue entities. Most of the research in criminology and sociology suggests an explanatory model of deviance to analyze the dynamics of the phenomenon. However, describing terrorist acts as merely criminal acts can produce serious limitations to understanding movements that choose to engage in terrorist activity as a strategy to further their cause. Solely equating terrorism with criminality – i.e., deviant behavior that violates formal laws – discounts the social, political, cultural, and historical motivations that drive people to employ violence as a strategy for collective action. Recent literature in the discipline argues for the significance of using other theories, particularly those within a social movement framework, to effectively explain why certain groups that engage in 'contentious politics' choose to employ terror instead of non-violence as a movement tactic (Leheny 2005; Beck 2008; Goodwin 2012)[2].

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[1] There is no universally agreed upon and legally binding definition of terrorism. Scholars and policy makers alike have sought to formulate the concept with no consensus. Each country has its own interpretation of the phenomenon within its penal code. The United Nations has twelve conventions on terrorist acts (covering, *inter alia*, offenses on aircrafts, threats to civil aviation, nuclear terrorism, terrorist bombings and the financing of terrorism), none of which have a clear definition of terrorism per se. Since 2000, the UN has been working on a proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which would criminalize all forms of international terrorism. However, the negotiations have been deadlocked due to failure to come to a consensus over the definition of terrorism. The last round of negotiations from 11-15 April 2011 similarly had no success. Hoffman (2004) provides a helpful list of characteristics that have been common to most definitions in the field. Terrorism 1) contemplates political aims and motives; 2) entails violence or threats of violence; 3) is designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; and 4) is conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia); and 5) is perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity. As this paper focuses on non-state or oppositional terrorism, the definition set forth by Goodwin (2006) is that which I shall use to operationalize the concept of terrorism in this paper: ***Terrorism is the strategic use of violence and threats of violence by an oppositional political group against civilians or noncombatants, and is usually intended to influence several audiences.***

[2] The notion of contentious politics – a tool or technique to make a political point or resist oppression – in social movement scholarship is currently and actively being reframed to include political violence and terrorism (as well as non-violence) in its conceptualization. The most recent evidence of this upsurge in interest regarding the use of this theoretical and analytical framework within social movement

In this paper, I apply the multi-institutional politics approach to analyze social movements proposed by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) to ask: **What drives a particular political movement to choose violent tactics over a peaceful strategy to further its cause? What are the conditions that determine and perpetuate the specific types of violent tactics that the movement employs? What does this tell us about terrorist movements and the tactics that these groups design and use?**

I posit that the use of a social movements lens can indeed help us explore these questions and understand – in ways that a deviance or criminological lens cannot – why certain collective action groups carry out terrorist acts as their primary tactic. This study will consider these questions by turning to Southeast Asia – a region acknowledged as a haven of terrorism. There, we find a social movement organization (SMO) in the Philippines particularly notorious for employing terror tactics since its inception as an Islamic separatist group in the early 1990s – the Abu Saayyf Group (ASG). Focusing on this particular SMO that engages in terrorism will be my starting point for this exploration.

Following the foundational questions of this study and turning to the case of the ASG, I thus ask: **Why has the Abu Sayyaf Group continually and effectively engaged in political violence and terrorist activity despite long-running and escalating militaristic strategies directly aimed to quell their activities?** Proceeding from this primary question, this study will further ask: **What are the motivations of the ASG in choosing to employ terror? What institutions and conditions (social, economic, political, cultural and/or historical) have led the group to choose such tactics, and have allowed these tactics to endure?**

Examining the ASG as a social movement organization – instead of as a tightly knit militaristic organization engaged in an all-out unconventional war against the Philippine state – I

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literature is the publication of a special issue on political violence, terrorism and social movements by the journal Mobilization (the international quarterly review of social movement research) in March 2012.

suggest that (1) the ASG engages in political violence and terrorism not solely to challenge and overthrow the state (and institute their own), but more significantly to strategically challenge the dominant socio-economic, political and meaning/cultural systems of power in the Philippines; (2) the tactics employed by the ASG have been shaped by the unique and context-specific cultural, historical, political and social conditions that the group exists and operates in; and (3) these unique mélange of conditions that drive the ASG's actions have been made invisible by viewing the group as a tightly-knit group of bandits; something *other* than a social movement whose actions can be viewed as product of the social, economic, political and cultural landscape in which they operate, leading to failed military efforts to placate the group.

I posit that the nature of the problem is multi-institutional – developmental, cultural, historical, social and political all at the same time. Using violence is a result of an almost unconscious combination of context-specific conditions that are completely different from environments in which other Islamic extremist groups find themselves. Strategies are dependent on the struggle for material and symbolic power at the systemic level, and the presence or absence of an ideologue-leader together with the members' desire to attain socio-economic survival – and then dominance – at the group level. This implies that a purely militaristic approach that aims to completely eliminate them will simply be a cause of perennial frustration; for as long as the multi-layered power structures and dynamics in Mindanao – and the rest of the Philippines for that matter – continue as they are, then the ASG will continue to use terror tactics to challenge the status quo.

Significance of the Study

The goal of the inquiry at hand is to examine a particular terrorist movement through a multi-institutional politics approach to social movements to achieve a more nuanced view of the ASG – a view that will be useful in understanding first, the dynamics of the group; second, the motivations and conditions surrounding the use of violence and terror as a social movement

tactic; and lastly, how these violent strategies may be contained based on the conditions surrounding their use. It will thus seek to identify certain general conditions or contexts within which the radical movement operates that may have significant bearing on the tactical decision-making processes of terrorist movements. This analysis could then produce new insights on how certain movements choose terror over non-violence and how the anti-terrorism strategy does (or does not) become useful for groups that engage in violent collective action. Perhaps this study could also propel similar sociological studies of terrorist groups to increase our understanding of terrorism as a social movement phenomenon.

Resolving these research questions is not only essential for Southeast Asia but more so for the Philippines, which has – in the past forty years alone – experienced the most tragedies in the region as a result of terrorist attacks, not a few of which have been perpetrated by the ASG[3.] The misconception of the dynamics of the ASG leads to a mismatch between the response of the government and the ASG's nature, struggle, and demands as a social movement organization. A more nuanced understanding based on an alternative social movement approach to the issue could contribute to conciliating this protracted conflict in the southern Philippines.

In order to explore the questions posed above and provide a solid departure point to analyze the ASG, it is necessary at this point to review the links made in the literature between social movements, political violence, and terrorism, as well as the existing theoretical and conceptual scholarship on social movements.

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[3] Data from the Global Terrorism Database show that the Philippines has recorded the highest number of attacks in the region at 3,192 incidents of terrorism from 1970 (first year covered by the database) to 2010. Thailand comes in second with 1,697 incidents, Indonesia with 488 incidents and Malaysia with 45 incidents for the same time period. Important to note however, is that majority of incidents in Thailand are perpetrated by non-Islamic groups or unknown perpetrators.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW
Social Movements, Political Violence and Terrorism

Within political sociology and social movements scholarship, the state is arguably referred to as the dominant institution that shapes social structures and determines the flow of power within and among different areas of society. This notion stemming from state theories in political sociology consequently downplays the contribution of non-elites, or the oppressed, and other non-state institutions in the political process. However, by using social movements as tools, ordinary people are able to participate in public affairs and politics (Tilly 2004) and effect change. Social movements have the objective of promoting or resisting change in society or the world order to which they belong (McAdam and Snow 1997), and this is why they usually – if not always – occur in relation to fiercely contested social or political issues of the day. It is also crucial to note that social movements are manifested through various organizations (Zald and Ash 1966), hence making 'social movement organizations' (SMOs) crucial to any analysis. McAdam and Snow (1997: xviii) were able to take note of these characteristics and identify common elements of social movements as found in the literature: 1) collective or joint action; 2) change-oriented goals; 3) some degree of organization; 4) some degree of temporal continuity; and 5) some extrainstitutional collective action, or a mixture or extrainstitutional and institutional activity. One can argue that since violent Islamic separatist groups such as the ASG work as a collectivity, seek to effect political change, operate through an organization or network, have been able to maintain its presence in the country despite harsh state and non-state opposition, and engage in "extrainstitutional" and violent collective action, then the ASG can – and should – be analyzed as a social movement organization.

Thus, there has been a view within the political sociology and social movements literature that SMOs – as groups that engage in fundamentally extra-institutional activities to effect change – often engage in 'contentious politics.' This means that they use disruptive

techniques to resist elite power, challenge policy, or simply make a political point. Contentious politics involves "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties" (Tilly 2008). So how does violence – and more importantly terrorism – figure into social movement scholarship?

Movement scholars have constantly examined the tactics of social movement organizations with the belief that tactics influence policy responsiveness on the part of the movement's target audience (Burstein et. al. 1995) and, eventually, achieve the desired social change. Violence – the use of great physical force to inflict injury to people or damage on property (della Porta 1995; Graham and Gurr 1969) – has been used tactically to achieve social change. Thus, while researchers have looked into the effectiveness of non-violent tactics such as boycotts and sit-ins, Burstein et. al (1995) observe that violence has actually been the most scrutinized strategy in the field. According to them, most scholars who have examined the choice of violence by a group suggest that violent tactics are used because they effectively help SMOs achieve their goals (Gamson 1975; Colby 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977, 1979, cited in Burstein et. al. 1995). Nevertheless, other research has pointed to the ineffectiveness of violence in that it may reduce third party-support (Schumaker 1975) or result in a powerful response from the target (Colby 1985). Still others posit, as observed by Burstein et. al., that violence "has no independent effect on policy responsiveness" when used by SMOs (Mirowsky and Ross 1981; Hahn 1970).

While violence is not a new subject of analysis in social movements, it is essential to note that the violent tactics referred to in the early years of social movement scholarship (as catalogued by della Porta and Tarrow 1986; and della Porta 1995) do not seem to contemplate violence as employed by insurgents or terrorist groups. Terrorist violence was largely perceived as criminal behavior rather than contentious politics, and consequently beyond the ambit of social movement scholarship. Thus, violence – as studied by movement scholars for decades –

only pertained to acts like civil disobedience, violent confrontations between groups, riots, inflicting property damage, trespassing, holdups, hijackings, and clashes with police.

However, the way people have chosen to engage in contentious politics has drastically transformed in recent history (Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1999; Tilly 2008). The tactics they use to further their cause no longer simply consist of peaceful rallying on the streets on the one hand, or bloody riots against ranks of police officers on the other. This is because participants in social movements are political actors, and their behavior and choices while engaging in the movement have much to do with the movement's success (or failure). Political violence is thus one form that contention may take (Goodwin 2012; Bosi and Guigini 2012); a strategy that a social movement organization may choose to employ if it will translate to success. However, despite the focus on 'violent' tactics early on, *radical* political violence and terrorism as 'contentious politics' – a tool or technique to make a political point or resist oppression – has been virtually absent from social movement scholarship (Goodwin 2012). Some have even argued that social movements are *not* violent, although they may engage in 'violent performances' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007), effectively pushing out terrorist groups from the domain of social movements. As a consequence, only a handful of works have studied political violence or terrorism through a social movements lens: a treatise on the importance of socio-psychological factors and ideology as causes of political violence (Gurr 1970), an analysis of collective violence in the European perspective (Tilly 1969), a comparative analysis of movements engaged in political violence in Italy and Germany (della Porta 1995), and an examination of micromobilization of the Irish Republican Army (White 1989).

Jeff Goodwin (2012) observes that this resistance within the discipline to include political violence and terrorism as a strategy of social movements seemed to change drastically after the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11). Social movement analysts began to wrestle with violence and terrorism, expanding the literature to include work on violence in civil wars (Kalyvas 2006), violent Islamic activism (Wicktorowicz 2004), and repression by the government against white

hate groups (Cunningham 2004). Concepts such as 'radicalization' (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2012), and leaderless resistance (Deboratz and Waldner 2012) began to be theorized and comparatively studied within social movements frameworks. At the same time, work on the strategy of non-violent resistance (Schock 2005; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011) as contentious politics has also been on the rise, with studies on how members of a movement choose to disengage with social movement organizations that decide to carry out violent acts (Horgan 2009; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2012). Contentious politics in social movement scholarship is thus currently and actively being reframed to include political violence – as well as non-violence – in its conceptualization[4]. Moreover, terrorist groups are now coming to be recognized as either local or transnational SMOs (Leheny 2005). The amplified discussion on violence and non-violence as social movement tactics, coupled with the recognition of terrorist groups as SMOs, are two significant steps that provide scholars of terrorism with the much needed impetus to further knowledge on existing and bourgeoning terrorist organizations, under the ambit of social movement models.

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[4] A relevant collection of current trends in the literature was published as a special issue on political violence and terrorism by the journal Mobilization (the international quarterly review of social movement research) in March 2012 (Vol. 17, No.1).

Chapter 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The Multi-Institutional Politics Approach vs. Traditional Social Movement Theories

Given the singular character of terrorist movements, is there a more appropriate theoretical or analytical approach for examining such groups using social movement theories?

As persistent, organized, and collective efforts from below that seek to resist, challenge or otherwise alter power relationships and policies from the state (Glasberg and Shannon 2010), I posit that it is most beneficial to examine social movements from the bottom-up, within the context of multiple institutions. This case study of the ASG will thus use the *multi-institutional politics approach to social movements* as proposed by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008).

Their proposed approach mainly challenges the once-dominant political process model, which assumes that "domination [is] organized by and around one source of power, that political and economic structures of society [are] primary and determining, and that culture [is] separate from structure and secondary in importance" (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 74). Instead, they view domination as "organized around *multiple sources of power*, each of which is simultaneously material and symbolic" (emphasis mine, Armstrong and Bernstein 2008:75). Under this framework, social movements not only challenge the state or political conditions, but other institutions – including those shaped by history, culture, or socio-economic factors – to seek policy change, inclusion, cultural change or changes in the rules of the game. Their goals may be material and symbolic, thus leading to the necessity of a deeper examination of their grievances by policy makers and scholars alike. Following these assumptions and given the nature of a social movement under the multi-institutional politics approach, it is then apropos to ask why the challenges of a particular SMO take the forms that they do. Applied to the case at hand, the framework allows us a deeper examination of why the ASG chooses to be a violent terrorist social movement, and what conditions – beyond political opportunities – lead to their actions.

In seeking to explain the relationship between political phenomena and social structure, the early study of social movements saw an emphasis on the 'orientations' of these movements (Walder 2009) or on what particular conditions facilitated their emergence. The dominant focus in the literature is on explaining collective action as a result of structural strains such as ambiguities, deprivations, wars, disasters, and the like, which bring about rapid social change and disintegration (Smelser 1963; Morrison 1971; Turner and Killian 1972; Tilly, Tilly and Tilly 1975; Marx and Wood 1975). A specific type of strain that many sociologists are drawn toward is 'deprivation': People engage in social movements because they are incited by a lack of what they need (absolute deprivation) or what they believe they need (relative deprivation). Marx and Engels (1967) provide the classic argument for absolute deprivation theory in the context of a capitalist political economy. They posit that the revolution of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie would inevitably be driven by the immiseration experienced by the former. This immiseration or absolute deprivation was seen as the cause for the formation of religious groups or sects (Niebhur 1929) and commitment to religious institutions (Glock 1964).

The explanatory power of absolute deprivation however was challenged by empirical studies that demonstrated a noticeable lack of correlation between absolute deprivation and the outbreak of revolutions (Davies, 1969; 1974); hence, some scholars argued that relative deprivation – one's feeling of discontent over one's situation based on what one wants to have in comparison with a "reference group" or an expected outcome (Morrison 1971) – was a more reasonable explanation for social movements. Relative deprivation theory was used to explain the occurrence of revolutions and rebellions throughout history (Davies 1962, 1969, 1974; Klandermans, Roefs and Olivier 2001), forms of political violence such as turmoil, conspiracy and internal/civil war, and the emergence of contention (Gurr 1969, 1970), the relationship of poverty and movement participation (Pinard 1967), and was also seen as a framework to assess how

beliefs about social structures are created by the relative deprivation felt by participants (Morrison 1971).

The limitations of strain theory – and deprivation theory – have become a concern for some sociologists who observe that social movements do not always emerge despite harsh conditions experienced by a group; that is, there seems to be no direct relationship between (material/economic) hardship or deprivation and the rise of social movements (Snyder and Tilly 1972; Oberschall 1973; Jenkins 1983; Mueller 1972; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988). Looking at the relevance of this for efforts to explain terrorism through economic terms, it has been shown that there is no correlation between a country's poverty level or level of educational attainment and its propensity for terrorist activity (Abadie 2004; Krueger and Malekova 2003). Interesting to note then, is whether non-economic strains – such as cultural or ideological – can be considered as triggers for terrorist movements, especially those like the ASG that appear to be based on particular religious or ideological tenets. Nevertheless, such contradictions within deprivation theory have led to the formulation and propagation of theories that challenge the role of strains in driving collective action, particularly resource mobilization and political process models of social movements.

Proponents of resource mobilization argue that social movements or revolutions do not take place in the absence of "access to critical supportive resources" (Glasberg and Shannon 2010). The emphasis is on the links between movement and institutionalized action, the rationality of actors, strategic dilemmas confronted by movements, and the role of the movement in social change (Jenkins 1983). The preeminence of resources (particularly the types and amounts of resources) in determining not only the emergence of a social movement, but also its capacity for continued mobilization at various operational levels, has been examined and applied in various studies including that of local movement organizations (McCarthy and Wolfson 1996), the rise of the civil rights movement in America (Morris 1984), and even the nature of

environmental and peace movements as characterized by access to middle class professionals (McCrea and Markle 1989).

In terrorism policy and scholarship, terrorist recruitment and financing is a major area of interest, given the popular view that a terrorist group needs to build and maintain a financial infrastructure like any other criminal organization,[5] and that cutting off the funding and manpower of terrorist groups will serve as a deterrent against their actions[6]. With the ASG engaging in kidnap for ransom and extortion activities to obtain most of its financing (Banlaoi 2010) and reports that it may have received funding from radical Islamic benefactors in the Middle East and South Asia (Niksch 2002), a resource mobilization approach to analyze ASG operations may seem beneficial. Nevertheless, focusing on resources may miss the point: Resources – financial or human – are arguably only a means to an end for movements. What drives the group to commit violent acts (apart from raking in money) appears to be overlooked under this framework.

A number of scholars agree that resources are still only part of the explanation when examining movements. For this set of sociologists, political opportunities actually determine their emergence. Proponents of the political process perspective hold the necessity of having 'conditions of conduciveness' (McAdam and Snow 1997) for movements. Fundamentally, their position is that a *structure* of political opportunities helps explain the variation in movement behavior throughout history (Lipsky 1970; Eisenger 1973; Meyer and Miknoff 2004), no matter what issue the movement takes up as its cause. In fact, this structure of political opportunities – one that would make movements vulnerable to failure or primed for success – has been examined in cases such as the black insurgency in the U.S. (McAdam 1982), the anti-nuclear

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[5] Money laundering and the financing of terrorism. 2009. European Union Committee. Available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldselect/ldeucom/132/13204.htm, Accessed on August 7, 2012.

[6] After 9/11, for instance, the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) issued the 'Forty Recommendations on money laundering' and the '9 Special Recommendations (SR) on Terrorism Financing (TF)'. Available at http://www.fatf-gafi.org/documents/repository/ guidanceforfinancialinstitutionsindetectingterroristfinancing.html. Accessed on August 5, 2012.

power movement (Meyer 1993; Joppke 1993), the pro-choice/pro-life movement-countermovement interaction (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), the women's movement in America (Constain 1992), and even the juxtaposition of farm workers' movements (Jenkins and Perrow 1977).

The political process model seems to be a fitting tool for studying movements like terrorist groups, which are primarily motivated by politically related aims. For the ASG, that 'publicized' aim is to establish an Islamic theocracy in the southern Philippines and destabilize the existing Philippine state. Using the political process model could situate this study within the historical context of the ASG's political struggle vis-à-vis the Philippine state. Yet, given that the model views power as organized around the state and fails to account for the significance of other powerful institutions such as the family, cultural or religious institutions, or economic structures as explanatory factors, the political process model may provide an incomplete analysis for a uniquely complex case.

Other theories such as framing (Goffman 1974; Gamson et al 1982; Snow and Benford 1988) and the cultural-cognitive approach to social movement analysis (see Beck 2008) have also found a place in the literature; but political process theory is considered the "hegemonic paradigm" among social movement analysts (Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Nevertheless, the intricate nature of social movements does not lend itself to interpretation by a universal model (McAdams and Snow 1997; Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Hence, there is increasing support in the field for more nuanced and inclusive models of analysis, especially those that consider the impact of culture, shared meanings and non-state institutions of power. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), Whitter (2002), Cress and Snow (2000), Armstrong and Bernstein (2008), and Beck (2008) are some of the more recent scholars who argue for a more integrative theoretical approach to social movements. They believe in using a theory of social movements that

recognizes the varying contexts and layers of oppressions, multiple pathways of outcome attainment for movements, and the multiple sources of power that propel social movements.

Although framing their approaches differently and employing varied concepts (i.e., Whitter's multi-layered view; Cress and Snow's combinatorial and interactive approach; Armstrong and Bernstein's multi-institutional politics approach; and Beck's tripartite approach), their work indicates a burgeoning crusade for a more multi-faceted and context-based method for analyzing social movements. While these frameworks may be accused of taking the 'kitchen sink' approach, such a multi-faceted phenomenon as social movements – the definition of which is already being challenged by the emergence of organizations like terrorist groups – needs a holistic and multidimensional framework to be unpacked.

One other theory (outside the social movements umbrella) that needs some consideration here is that which has also been used prominently in social science research on terrorism across various fields – rational choice theory. Rational choice began as a theory in economics and was eventually adopted by other social scientists in an attempt to combine theory-guided research with empiricism when exploring social facts (Lindenberg 1992). The theory is based on the principle that actors are (economically) self-interested and that they act through a cost-benefit analysis with the goal of maximizing utility. Rational choice analysts can thus assume that terrorist behavior is foreseeable; that is, people are always motivated by the wants or goals that express their 'preferences' and they act based on the information they possess within specific, given constraints (Scott 2000: 127). Moreover, since rational choice uses strategic mathematical modeling or games (see Coleman 1964; Keiser and Hechter 1998), using such models to examine and predict terrorist behavior comes across as logical, scientific, and highly accurate.

Yet, given that we have limited information and intelligence about the interests of terrorist groups and governments, I would argue that game theoretic models and strategies based on

cost-benefit analyses of competing actors in this context can only lead to more misunderstandings, which could then only agitate actors – such as the ASG – who may believe themselves to be perennially misunderstood. The ranking of preferences in any rational choice model will always be based on the researcher's interpretations of meanings and interests. Moreover, the theory leaves no room for the nuanced influences of culture, ideology, history or collective action in assessing preferences and interests. Although one can argue that these factors can be packaged as interests in themselves, the malleable nature of these elements is lost once when they are boxed into static rational models and quantified. It would be ideal to systematically and quantitatively explain the behavior of the ASG, but assuming perfect information about interests of highly dynamic yet covert groups will only bring us further away from understanding our unit of analysis.

I maintain then that Armstrong and Bernstein's (2008) multi-institutional politics approach to social movements is the most useful and beneficial tool to study movements as complex as terrorist groups. Armstrong and Bernstein's approach will go beyond the narrow analysis of deprivation, the limited analysis of political conditions and state power as demanded by political process theory, the myopic examination of the conditions that support a group's actions as called for by resource mobilization theory, and the static models of rational choice to provide a more comprehensive and multi-faceted analytical lens.

Chapter 4. DATA and METHODS

This thesis uses the case study as a methodological design frame that necessarily incorporates various data collection methods (Stake 2005, p.443, cited in Thomas 2011: 512). The case study as a research method has a twofold technical definition:

> [First], a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident…[Second,] the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result, relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion and, as another result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin 2009: 18).

This definition emphasizes the all-encompassing nature of the case study as a methodological frame of inquiry that "covers the logic of design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis" (Yin 2009:18) making the case study as a research method more than just a design or data collection technique (Stoeker 1991). Analytical eclecticism is the key to how a case study is conducted (Thomas 2011) given that the phenomenon under scrutiny is complex and unique, and cannot be adequately analyzed using a single data set or a limited number of variables. It is thus important to note that the case study method is not limited to being a qualitative study; it can be a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods as called for by the research question (Yin 2008).

For this study, the case is the ASG and the 'universe' is the entire class of violent social movements in Southeast Asia. The ASG is the subject of the study; that is, its practical and historical unity. The object of the study – the theoretical, scientific basis for the case – is the resistance of social movement organizations to dominant social, political and cultural institutions through violence and terror (George and Bennett, Wieviorka 1992: 159). In order to answer the research questions about the motivations and conditions behind employing terror tactics and

political violence using the multi-institutional politics approach, the study engages two main methods: 1) content analysis and 2) semi-structured interviews.

The content analysis focuses on the examination of publicly available as well as classified government intelligence documents and/or archival texts on the ASG (obtained with permission from intelligence authorities), as well as the Philippine government's counterterrorism policy over time. Publicly available news reports (newspaper and television) on ASG activities from its first attack in 1991 to the present, open source file interviews of ASG members, as well as open source statements (text/audio) from the ASG about their goals and activities were examined. Previous social science research on the history and operations of the ASG were also consulted.

Additional data for this study was obtained through interviews conducted with the following target groups: 1) Philippine government officials working in anti-terrorism agencies; 2) police and military officials who have formerly worked on or are currently working on the government's counterterrorism strategy related to the ASG; 3) journalists who have interacted with or interviewed members of the ASG; and 4) scholars who have done research on the ASG and Islamic separatism in the Philippines. Efforts were made to secure interviews with former members of the ASG who are not detained or involved in any prosecution, but security issues and government requirements did not allow for the interviews to be securely obtained during the researcher's trip to Manila.[7]

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[7] The initial plan for this study was to interview alleged members of the ASG who are currently detained in two prisons in Metro Manila – one in Camp Crame, Quezon City and the other in Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig City. The Philippine police attaché assigned to the Embassy in Washington D.C. had already suggested that a formal letter requesting access to the detainees be sent directly to the Director of the Philippine National Police in Manila. However, after lengthy discussions with this project's adviser and a consultation with the Institutional Review Board of the university, I decided not to pursue the interviews with the detainees. Given the nature of the group and its classification by the U.S. Department of State as a foreign terrorist organization, interviews with detainees associated with the ASG are fraught with security and legal issues, especially given the surveillance and intelligence laws in the U.S. that govern information on suspected foreign terrorists. This in itself could compromise the legal rights and safety of the detainee, especially those in the midst of a criminal investigation or legal proceeding, not to mention the kind and amount of information revealed during the interview, which could put the detainees in a hazardous legal predicament.

Interviewing current ASG detainees could also raise security issues for involved in the research project in any capacity, as well as for me. On a practical note, as the prisoner regulations for human subject research would apply in such a case, obtaining approval for interviews with the said target group would be challenging given the short time frame of the research trip, as well as the

The interviews were conducted in Manila during a trip to the Philippines from December 17, 2012 to January 18, 2013. The government officials, police and military personnel, journalists and scholars were identified before the trips to the field. The goal of the interviews was to collect various perspectives on the motivations of the ASG to employ terror and violence as tactics, compare and contrast them, and come to conclusions about what actually drives the ASG to perpetrate violent acts as a political movement. All interviews strictly followed the guidelines for ethical research involving human subjects, and the rights of all interviewees to confidentiality and anonymity have been protected from the time they were contacted until the data from their interviews were transcribed and analyzed. None of the names of the interviewees are revealed in this study. All names or references used here (except for the names of known or suspected ASG members as reported) have been changed.

As in all research on terrorism, the main challenge for this study was how to deal with the limited data available on terrorist groups, and the inability to immediately and safely access the subjects under study, i.e. the members of the ASG themselves, not to mention being able to ensure that the interaction with the interviewees in this study remains within the constraints for protecting human subjects. While first hand data and personal responses from Islamic fundamentalists in the southern Philippines would ideally and theoretically provide the most credible information on the motivations behind the tactics of the ASG, interviews with ASG elements are virtually impossible to arrange and fraught with access, validity, confidentiality and security issues. There is also the question of reliability of the information obtained from such prospective interviewees (especially if these interviewees are protecting their identities or whereabouts), as well as the validity of the information or second-hand data obtained from interviews with government officials or journalists.

fact that information (to be included in the IRB application) about the detainees from the government agency responsible for them would be limited. Such lack of information could compromise the integrity and validity of the interviews, and may even require me to submit amendments to my protocol while in the field. Given these factors, the costs of pursuing interviews with detainees outweigh the benefits.

I am well aware of these data limitations and validity concerns and have done my utmost to take steps that would not compromise the confidentiality and validity of the interviews, as well as respect the rights of the interviewee (from whatever target group) to confidentiality and anonymity. All field work and data collection processes adhered to the proper ethical guidelines regarding human subject research especially with regard to obtaining consent, setting up a secure interview location, and ensuring a non-intimidating interview environment (e.g., guaranteeing the absence of any proximate influential presence in the interview such as a government aide or guard when interviewing).

Despite the fact that interviews from former ASG members were not obtained, the heavy reliance of the study on secondary data analysis (e.g., testimonies from interviewees who had first-hand interactions with them, ASG statements from existing media interviews with the group) would not render the study invalid. In fact, using the multi-institutional politics approach to analyze existing data from archives and open-source reports, supplemented by interviews collected from Philippine military and police intelligence officers, journalists and scholars, could provide a nuanced and fresh perspective on the tactical decisions of the ASG.

PART II.
THE CASE

Chapter 5. THE BACK STORY
History, Politics, Socio-economics of the '*Moro'* landscape in the Philippines

HISTORY/IDEOLOGY

If one is to closely analyze the case of the Abu Sayyaf Group and the institutions of power that shape the Muslim insurgency in the Philippines, an understanding of the historical, geo-political and socio-economic landscape surrounding the struggle of the '*Moros*'[8] in the country is crucial – especially in a predominantly Christian nation.[9]

The Philippine archipelago is divided into three major island groups: Luzon in the north (where the capital Manila sits), the Visayas at the center (where one of the most developed provinces in the country – Cebu – is located), and Mindanao in the south. The Christian majority has traditionally resided in Luzon and the Visayas with some moving into Mindanao towards the latter part of the 20th century, while the Muslim minority historically settled in the south.

Figure 1. Map of the Philippines
Note: The area in red is Mindanao.

The arrival of Islam in the Philippines, however, predates the onset of Christianity by about two to three centuries, with historical records showing Muslim traders landing on Philippine shores in 1380 as part of the expansion of Islam to Southeast Asia after the Prophet

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8   The term 'Moro' is Spanish for 'Moors,' a reference used by the Spanish colonial authorities for the Muslims in Mindanao (and other territories), which has been used widely since.
9   According to the 2010 Philippine Census, 81% are Roman Catholic, 10% belong to other Christian denominations, and only 5% are Muslim.

Mohammad's death (Caballero-Anthony 2007; Gowing and McAmis 1974; Al-Attas 1969).[10] This makes Islam the oldest recorded monotheistic religion in the country.

The Muslim traders reached the southern Philippines through trade routes from neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia, settling in Mindanao and first establishing *sultanates*[11] in 1450 AD in the provinces now known as Sulu[12] and Maguindanao (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005). What is significant here is that Islam brought more than religion to the largely pagan inhabitants of the islands: The structure of feudal sultanates brought an unprecedented means of social and political power and control to the entire archipelago. With no other leaders or communities exerting expansive authority throughout the Philippine islands, Muslim leaders in the south were able to "exercise varying degrees of control over the other non-Muslim inhabitants, …conduct trade and military expeditions from Luzon in the north to the Moluccas in the south, and establish Muslim communities as far north as Manila" (Milligan 2003:470).

What the Spanish colonizers encountered upon the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan's fleet in the island of Leyte in 1521 was thus not a society of unorganized native tribes; rather they encountered a contender for state power engaged in its own territorial and spiritual expansion (Majul 1999; McKenna 1998 as cited in Milligan 2003). Spain successfully subjugated the north and the central islands, converting the natives in those areas to Catholicism. This success, however, was never achieved in Mindanao (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005; Caballero-Anthony 2007). In the face of the land dispossession and displacement process established by the Spaniards through the feudal *encomienda* system, the Muslim sultanates struggled to defend their own feudal system and control over the tribes that had undergone Islamization since the

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[10] After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, which instigated the expansion of Islam to Europe and Africa, it is believed that the wave spread to Southeast Asia by Muslim traders and missionaries who set out from India and Arabia specifically to convert the non-faithful; and by war waged against non-Muslim states. See the article by Wadja K. Esmula and Muhiddin Batara Mutia for more details, available at http://www.islamawareness.net/Asia/Philippines/philippines.html.

[11] A sultanate is the dynasty and land in a Muslim state ruled by a sultan, traditionally acquired by hereditary rights

[12] The sultanate was founded in the 1400s by Arab explorer and religious scholar Sayyid Abu Bakr Abirin after he settled in Sulu. After the marriage of Abu Bakr and local dayang-dayang (princess) Paramisuli, he founded the sultanate and assumed the title Paduka Mahasari Maulana al Sultan Sharif ul-Hāshim.

14th century (May 1992 cited in Podder 2012). Spain attempted to eradicate Islam by attacking Sulu and Mindanao (Caballero-Anthony 2007), beginning a period of intermittent wars with the *Moros* from 1548 until 1898. In these battles between sultanates and the Spanish *conquistadores* however, the Muslims emerged victorious and were able to maintain their rule over the south.

It was not until Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States in 1898 that assimilation of the Muslim south into the central system of governance figured into the country's political history. While the United States initially sought to protect the *Moros* from foreign intrusion and respected the authority of the *sultans* and Muslim chiefs, the group was recognized as a minority to be included in national life (Amoroso 2004 cited in Banlaoi 2010). A 'policy of integration' was adopted by America, which, in principle, recognized the traditional power and influence of *datus (sultans)*. Nevertheless, instead of allowing them to autonomously rule over their territories, the *datus* were incorporated into the central governance system by being elected into political offices as provincial governors, senators and congressmen (Podder 2012). The goal was to have the Muslim populations represented in the colonial government. The process gave rise to "Muslim-Filipinos" – a new generation of Muslim leaders "who accepted that Mindanao was inextricably linked to the larger political framework centered in Manila" (Abinales 2000). However, such integration was perceived by some Islamic fundamentalists as a form of loyalty to the colonial state (Stark 2003 in Podder 2012) and a means by which the American colonizers could co-opt their leaders and continue dispossessing Muslim tribes from their ancestral lands. Thus, despite Americans taking control of most of the archipelago – including Mindanao – conflict and violence in the south remained endemic (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005) up to the 1930s.

But given the military might of the United States, the Muslims eventually gave up their armed resistance and resorted to collaboration or peaceful negotiations with the Americans (Banlaoi 2010; Caballero-Anthony 2007; Gowing 1983; Tan 1977). The period from the 1930s

until the end of WWII was thus a relatively silent period in Mindanao, but it was one that witnessed the burgeoning of sentiments for Muslim independence.

After WWII, Islam developed an international network, seeking to connect Muslim populations together under one *umma* (Islamic Brotherhood). This global wave reached Mindanao, and mobilized faithful local leaders to rise against the post-American Philippine state to fight for their independence. Organized separatist movements emerged in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, immediately following the infamous Jabidah Massacre – an incident in which members of the Philippine military (AFP) allegedly massacred dozens of Muslim recruits who escaped their covert training exercises for a plan to reclaim Sabah.

The Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) was the first separatist group founded in 1968 that aimed to establish a separate *Bangsamoro* (Muslim nation). Other radical groups soon followed, including the Bangsamoro Liberation Organization (BLO) and the more secular Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). From 1973 to 1976, these secessionists engaged in intense conflict with the Philippine government – a spate of skirmishes that resulted in about 100,000 deaths by the end of the decade (Molloy 1998).

Since 1976, the Philippine government has engaged in cycles of peace talks with the Muslim separatists in Mindanao – particularly the MNLF –with the government offering semi-autonomy through the establishment of Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).[13] When the MNLF leader Nur Misuari accepted this offer, factions within the MNLF resulted and a breakaway insurgency group – the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – was formed. The MILF, which adheres to Islamic fundamentalism and the *jihad* in its struggle for power and

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[13] The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao was created on August 1, 1989 though Republic Act 6734 (the Organic Act) pursuant to a Constitutional provision mandating an area in Mindanao, which would be autonomous from the central government. A plebiscite conducted in 14 provinces and 10 cities, to determine whether the residents agreed to part of the ARMM. Of these provinces and cities, only four – Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi - voted in favor of the new region. The ARMM was officially inaugurated on November 6, 1990.

independence, continues to engage in skirmishes with the government to this day despite cease-fire agreements and peace talks with the MNLF.

The MNLF, on the other hand, openly states that it is not associated or connected to any terrorist or domestic insurgency movement, and that armed struggle is "obsolete," (Echeminada 2013) – the reason it has agreed to engage in negotiations with the central government to settle the Mindanao problem. Most recently[14] however, with the latest round of negotiations running into a brick wall, its leader Nur Misuari declared himself President of the '*Bangsamoro Republik*,' and declared independence for the whole of Mindanao and the island of Palawan in the southwestern Philippines.[15]

Amidst all this, the secessionist crusade in Mindanao has been complicated by the emergence of more radical extremist bands such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Like the MILF, the professed objective of the ASG is the creation of an independent Islamic state through the use of force. The case of the ASG – as will be teased out in the subsequent chapter – has become the most notorious link in this long chain of secessionist movements.

Through the years, the cultural, political and religious discord that emanated from the Spanish to the American, to the post-colonial era, has remained and turned into a perennial condition of social unrest and conflict in Mindanao. As a minority group relegated to the southern part of the country, away from the seat of government in the north, Filipino Muslims remain largely isolated from the social, economic and political developments in the country, causing resentments between Christians and Muslims to remain high (Fernando: 1979, Rahman: 1954). But more significantly, the once purely religious conflict has evolved into a deep-seated power struggle between various social, political and cultural institutions in the region. This five-century, second-oldest conflict on earth – next only to the conflict between North and South Sudan that

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[14] On August 12, 2013.
[15] Available at Gulf News online: http://gulfnews.com/news/world/philippines/misuari-declares-independence-of-mindanao-southern-philippines-1.1220970. Accessed on 14 July 2013.

began in the 10th century (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005) – is thus arguably not coming to a close anytime soon.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Centuries of conflict in the southern Philippines have undoubtedly taken their toll on the cultural and socio-economic landscape of the region. As Caballero-Anthony (2007) observes, the "failure of the Spanish to subjugate the *Moros* and the impressive feat displayed by the latter to successfully defend their territory and remain uncolonized…could not however mitigate the massive devastation that resulted from the 333 years of aggression." The political and economic decay that resulted from severing productive links with the rest of the Philippines and Asia led to widespread poverty as the *Moros* "focused attention to fighting off the enemy rather than to productive endeavors" (Rodil 2002).

Despite being considered the agricultural basin of the Philippines that produces eight of the ten main exports of the country (Calderon 2004), Mindanao remains the most impoverished region with the latest census showing 10 of the 15 poorest provinces in the Philippines belonging to it.[16] The ARMM has consistently figured into the bottom cluster of the country's geo-political regions for years, with a poverty incidence among families between 42 to 47% in the first semesters of 2006, 2009, and 2012.[17] It also has the lowest functional literacy rate in the country (69%)[18] and life expectancy at 57 years (Chalk 1997 cited in Rabasa and Chalk 2001). More interesting is the fact that 64% of people living in Mindanao consider themselves poor – up from only 30% recorded in 2011 – according to a 2013 survey on self-rated poverty conducted by the Philippines' Social Weather Stations (SWS). This is not surprising as most provinces in the

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[16] 1st Semester 2012 Poverty Statistics released by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) on Tuesday, April 23, 2013.
[17] Ibid, from Rappler, Available at http://www.rappler.com/business/27276-poorest-provinces-philippines "MAP: The poorest provinces in PH."
[18] From the 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), National Statistics Office. Available at http://www.census.gov.ph/content/literacy-status-filipinos-results-2003-functional-literacy-education-and-mass-media-survey

region have limited or no access to basic social services, such as education, health, water supply and even electricity – with up to 8-hour daily power outages projected until 2015.[19]

In an environment beset by constant political unrest coupled with seemingly interminable impoverishment and a dearth of economic opportunities, how is survival and order achieved? How does a marginalized society operate and persist? In Mindanao, the answer is one that is a consequence of history and tradition: order is established through *power* and *might.*

The *Moro* struggle for continued autonomy in the face of the Spaniards and Americans (Milligan 2003) enshrined the use of force – when necessary – as a means to defend their Muslim way of life in Mindanao. Moreover, given the region's lack of resources and the inability of the central state to carry out the rule of law in the area, the supremacy of feudal clans (stemming from centuries of dominant sultanates), that became local warlords during WWII as part of "anti-Japanese guerilla forces" set up by the United States (Abinales 2009), and then turned into local private armies in support of the Marcos dictatorship, has led to the pervasiveness of a 'culture of warlordism.'

In Mindanao, the gun establishes order (Ressa 2013)[20]. *'Rido,'*[21] or violent clan feuding for power and resources, is a staple of daily life (Husin 2010). Since the 1930s, there have been about 1,300 cases of *rido* documented across Mindanao that have resulted in more than 5,000 killings (Husin 2010). While clan wars are not unique to Muslim communities, Mindanao or the Philippines, its pervasiveness in the ARMM has wider implications for conflicts (Canuday 2007, cited in Husin 2008) and more importantly, how the institutions of power are shaped in the region. When clan feuds of this nature occur in the same environment where separatist

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[19] "Mindanao Power Crisis: Brownouts to worsen next month as repair of plants starts,"
Available at http://www.interaksyon.com/business/67003/mindanao-power-crisis--brownouts-to-worsen-next-month-as-repair-of-plants-begins. Accessed on 10 July 2013.
[20] Also confirmed through author's interviews, December 2012-January 2013.
[21] Rido is a term commonly used by Maranaos and Iranuns (indigenous groups in Mindanao), which refers to a state of conflict where parties involved resort to violent retaliations and counter retaliations resulting to cyclic systems of vengeance. What makes Rido different from other violent conflicts are the tendencies of parties to retaliate violently targeting not just the offender but also other members of the family or clan. See Lingga in "Understanding Rido", Right to Self-Determination, Autonomy and Peace review, IAG Quarterly (2005:68-69)

movements operate, the parties to local feuds become intertwined with both the military and secessionist forces – a situation wherein interests are meshed, loyalties become nebulous, and conflicts escalate. As Canuday (2007) notes:

> "Feuds tend to interact in unfortunate ways with separatist conflicts. Such interplays occur when parties to local feuds are themselves part of the military resources of both the state and the rebel forces, or where state or rebel forces in ongoing-armed secessionists confrontations tap local armed groups."

This interplay becomes more interesting when one realizes that Muslim separatist movements have been actively trying to claim their autonomy and control over Mindanao since the 1970s; yet Muslim clan bosses and warlords have remained supreme over the territory. The latter have maintained power by keeping themselves in favor with the central government as cronies (during the Marcos regime) or elected officials who are deeply entrenched in a system of patronage. This translates to a clan's monopoly of resources, guns and ultimately, power (Ferrer 2010). And power, in this part of the country dubbed as the Philippines' 'Wild Wild West,' provides the holder with a license to use might and violence against anyone who threatens to take it (Ferrer 2010) – including separatists who may get in their way.

Following Joel Migdal's (1988; as cited in Ferrer 2010) 'weak state-strong society' theory, it can be argued that the southern Philippines is a victim of a 'weak state' – a region with a broken local governance structure and an absence of law enforcement – and a 'strong society' – a situation where influential groups such as feudal clans, warlords or rebels as in the case of Mindanao make significant demands on state institutions. This 'weak state-strong society' combination has turned Mindanao into a fertile and favorable ground for movements that wish to obtain material and symbolic power by challenging political, social and cultural institutions. It is a combination that makes violence not only a preferred tactic of such movements, but one that is inescapable. In exploring the origins and the dynamics of the ASG, we will soon realize that such

a context has made a significant impact on the operations and tactical choices of the movement

over time.

Chapter 6. THE SUBJECT OF STUDY
Knowing the "Enemy"

The death of Osama bin Laden may have put closure on the protracted manhunt for the most wanted terrorist in the world; but this milestone in the war on terror[22] has far from eliminated the global threat of terrorism. Despite heightened counterterrorism efforts after the tragedy of 9/11 we remain vulnerable to terrorist attacks from external and local perpetrators (Bergen 2011). The threat, however, is not confined to the United States.

Unbeknownst to many, Southeast Asia is one of the most threatened regions in the world. Recognized as the second front in the global war on terror just after the Middle East (Gershman 2002), Southeast Asia has become a convenient operations base for international terrorist networks owing to its porous borders, weak immigration control and historically close trade links with the Middle East. Despite counterterrorism efforts in the region through several declarations and treaties among countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations condemning terrorism and stipulating the need to share military manpower and intelligence, militancy and insurgency continue to rise[23]. The situation is particularly alarming in the Philippines, where violence and terrorist activity remains a tool used by Islamic extremist and separatist groups in Mindanao. The most notorious of these Muslim separatist bands in the Philippines is the Abu Sayyaf Group.

The Abu Sayyaf – Arabic for 'sword bearer' or 'father of the sword' (Torres 2001) – is one of the smallest terrorist groups in Southeast Asia (latest estimates show that it only has anywhere from 200 to 500 members[24]), yet it is one of the most aggressive and feared. It has reported connections to Jemaah Islamiyah – the most notorious Islamic fundamentalist group in

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[22] Editorial, Los Angeles Times, May 3, 2011 "After Osama bin Laden: The long-term consequences of the Al Qaeda leader's death will be complicated and not always what Americans hope for." Available at http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/03/opinion/la-ed-binladen-20110503. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

[23] Based on a Congressional Report on Terrorism in Southeast Asia (2009) prepared the Congressional Research Service; confirmed in interviews of the author with scholars and military intelligence officers.

[24] Ibid.

Indonesia that also engages in terrorism – and the Al Qaeda network. As a result, it has found itself on the United States' list of "most wanted" foreign terrorist organizations (Turner 2003), and has been designated by the United Nations as one of the three main terrorist organizations in Southeast Asia along with JI and Al Qaeda (Thayer 2005, cited in Banlaoi 2010). Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, it was even argued that the ASG resurfaced as "one of the more important terrorist groups" facing the Philippines, the United States and the entire Southeast Asian region (Abuza 2005).

Despite the predominant view that the ASG is a terrorist organization, perceptions have mounted – including from the Philippine government (Banlaoi 2010), the military and police[25] – that the group is merely a gang of bandits[26] indiscriminately engaging in extortion, kidnap for ransom, and even drug trafficking[27]. Nevertheless, the claim of the ASG remains: that it legitimately represents the desire of the Muslims in Mindanao to establish a separate Islamic state (Banlaoi 2010), and that it will continue uphold the *jihad* as it does so.

ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT

Exactly when and how the ASG was formed has been the subject of numerous conflicting accounts from intelligence officers and scholars alike. The precise date of its establishment is unknown, with estimates being between 1989-1991 (Banlaoi 2010; 2006; Vitug and Gloria 2000; Rabasa and Chalk 2001; Turner 1995). However, government and intelligence reports,[28] as well as information shared with me during my interviews with intelligence officers and scholars in Manila, show that recruitment began in 1989 when its Filipino founder and leader, Abdurajak Janjalani, allegedly returned to the Philippines from being a *mujahideen* in Afghanistan to form what was supposedly a group of freedom fighters for an independent

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[25] Author's interview with Philippine police intelligence, 07 January 2013.
[26] Former President Arroyo repeatedly referred to the ASG as "Abu Sayyaf bandits"
http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/general/arroyo-rules-out-talks-with-abu-sayyaf-bandits-1.418964
[27] Author's interviews with a scholar, military officers and military intelligence, 27 December 2012; 02 and 07 January 2013.
[28] Including one from the Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (no date given, p.6).

Islamic state in Mindanao. The Philippine military initially believed that the group was a militaristic unit and referred to it as the Mujahedeen Commando Freedom Fighters (Atkinson 2012, Banlaoi 2010). But testimony from a former leader of the ASG[29] reveals that *Jamaah Tableeg* was the actual group that preceded the ASG – one that propagated Islam through symposia and discussions rather than through violence or military operations (Banlaoi 2010).

From the core of *Jamaah Tableeg* arose what we now know as the ASG, initially referred to by Janjalani as *Al Harakatul Al-Islamiyyah* or AHAI (Banlaoi 2008)[30]. AHAI was created by Janjalani to wage *jihad qital* – an armed struggle (Abuza 2005; Ressa 2012, citing Banaloi 2008) – or *jihad fi sabilillah*, which translates to "a holy and just war for the cause of Allah" (Khattab 1995) or "fighting and dying for the cause of Islam" (Banlaoi 2008). The name Abu Sayyaf was apparently only Janjalani's nom de guerre (Ressa 2012, Banlaoi 2010) taken from renowned Afghan mujahedeen Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Since Janjalani signed this name below his teachings and statements representing his movement, the group was then referred to as 'Abu Sayyaf' by the Philippine military with the term subsequently adopted by the media.[31]

The change in the direction of the movement from a scholarly and peaceful propagation of Islam to an armed struggle was apparently triggered by Janjalani's discontent with Nur Misuari and the MNLF's decision to abandon the demand for independence,[32] and the subsequent establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao under the Philippine constitution. Janjalani remained committed to achieving a fully independent state in Mindanao (Turner 2003). With this new group, Janjalani thus effectively merged *Salafi Wahhabism* – a movement associated with a puritanical and literalist approach to Islam – with the long-running pursuit for Muslim independence in the Southern Philippines (Ressa 2012).

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[29] This leader was identified as Noor Umog in Balnaloi (2010).
[30] This was also confirmed during the author's interviews in Manila with a scholar, a military officer and other intelligence officers, 27 December 2012; 2 January 2013; 11 January 2013.
[31] Author's interview with a scholar, 27 December 2013.
[32] From Maria Ressa's interview with "Mohammad," a former leader of the ASG (Ressa 2012).

ORGANIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

As an organization, the ASG was envisioned as a "highly organized, systematic and disciplined" system of Muslim fighters in Mindanao with a military arm (Banlaoi 2005, 2006). It was to be headed by an executive council chaired by Janjalani and supported by 15 other *amirs*. This council would have two special committees – one that would oversee fundraising and another that would take charge of 'propaganda and agitation' (Banlaoi 2006).

The death of Janjalani in 1998 was a blow to the ASG, however, and this visualized system of administration was never fully realized. Khadaffy Janjalani, Abdurajak's younger brother, took over the reins and became the nominal leader until his death by military hands in 2006. But unlike his brother, Khadaffy was not a charismatic leader nor was he an educated ideologue.[33] So although he tried to revive the ASG's agenda, the group began to split into several factions as a result of the loss of a strong leader and ideologue that bound them. Khadaffy allegedly led the Sulu faction while another top leader, Galib Andang, controlled the Jolo faction (Banlaoi 2010). Concurrent with the emergence of factions was the beginning of the "degeneration" of the ASG into a bandit group (Abuza 2005) that carried out a spree of kidnap for ransom (KFR) activities from 2000 to 2004 – operations that were far from being a staple of the ASG strategy under Abdurajak Janjalani's leadership. Galib Andang allegedly led these KFR activities until he was captured and imprisoned. When he was killed in 2004 as he was attempting a jailbreak, the KFR activities of ASG also abated (Abuza 2005) and the group returned to high-profile bombing attacks.

Intelligence reports alleged that Khadaffy Janjalani was succeeded in 2007 by one of the two top leaders in Jolo – a radical ideologue named Yassir Igasan who studied Islamic jurisprudence in Syria. Philippine military officials considered this choice of a leader a

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[33]Author's interviews with a scholar and military intelligence officers in Manila, 27 December 2012 and 2 January 2013.

"plus factor for a group that [was] trying to reinvent itself"[34] after a long episode of straying from ideology-based extremist activities. However, more recent intelligence has shown that Radullan Sahiron, the only living co-founder of the ASG – and thus the most senior – is the supreme leader of the group. As a result, the United States' Rewards for Justice program has put a $1 million price tag on Sahiron's head.

Nevertheless, Abuza (2008) posits that since the mid-2000s, the ASG has "lacked any semblance of leadership" owing to the internal rifts brought by ideological and operational differences. This could also be the case as the movement is now infiltrated by poorly indoctrinated or radicalized members whose involvement is contingent only on whether or not they can obtain protection or immediate financial gain.[35]

THE CAUSE AND ITS LINKS

A learned scholar of theology and Islamic jurisprudence who pursued further studies in Libya, Syria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Vitug and Gloria 2003, Banlaoi 2008), Abdurajak Janjalani was known to be a charismatic leader, preacher and ideologue.[36] Around four years before he was killed in a shoot-out with the Philippine police in 1998, Janjalani penned the "Four Basic Truths" about the ASG to clarify the 'true' motivations and essence of the organization (Tan 1993, also cited in Banlaoi 2006, 2010 and Atkinson 2012):

> (1) Its goal is not to establish nor promote factions between Muslim struggles, as this would be contrary to the teachings of Islam. The objective of the ASG is to serve as a bridge between the revolutionary forces of both the MNLF and MILF whose roles and leadership in this struggle cannot be ignored.

> (2) Its ultimate strategic goal is the creation of a purely Islamic state whose "nature, meaning, emblem and objective" are synonymous with peace.

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[34] "Yasser Igasan succeeds Janjalani as Abu chief" GMA News Online, June 27, 2007. Available at http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/48531/news/regions/yasser-igasan-succeeds-janjalani-as-abu-chief. Accessed on August 13, 2013.

[35] Author's interviews with a scholar, journalist and military intelligence officer in Manila, 27 December 2012; 2 January 2013; 11 January 2013.

[36] Author's interviews with a scholar, journalist and military intelligence officials in Manila who all interacted with, were immersed with, or interviewed members of the ASG; 27 December 2012; 2 January 2013; 11 January 2013.

(3) Its advocacy of war is a necessity so long as the "oppression, injustice, capricious ambitions, and arbitrary claims imposed on Muslims" exist.

(4) It believes that "war disturbs peace only for the attainment of the true and real objective of humanity – the establishment of justice and righteousness for all under the law of the noble Quran and the purified Sunnah."

These tenets were not merely a function of Janjalani's intelligence and exposure to Islamic theology abroad. It is important to note that these were products of close ties with a larger Islamic fundamentalist movement and the latter's calculating process of expansion and indoctrination into a space that included the realm in which Janjalani revolved.

This is a significant point: In 1988, a year before Janjalani returned to the Philippines to recruit people to his cause, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network was formed (Ressa 2012). Bin Laden's brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, traveled to the Philippines to establish a financial network in the country in support of a local terrorist cell that would aid in their master plan to carry out "some of al-Qaeda's most imaginative and deadliest attacks around the world" (Ressa 2012). That cell was Janjalani's Abu Sayyaf. More than a dozen charities and non-governmental organizations[37] were created to funnel money into the ASG (and MILF) as well as Islamic centers that taught the faith to recruits. One of those centers was Darul Imam Shafi'ie – a school under the NGO International Islamic Relief Organization also founded by Khalifa – that served as a local mill for ideologically driven members of the ASG and MILF (Ressa 2012). Janjalani was a student at Darul Imam Shafi'ie, where he would meet fellow fundamentalists who would later become other co-founders and leaders of the ASG.

In an interview by journalist and Southeast Asia security expert Maria Ressa (2012) with one of the former leaders of the ASG, it was clear that the education Janjalani received at Darul

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[37] Maria Ressa (2012) provides a comprehensive list of these organizations in her recent book: Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), International Relief and Information Center (IRIC), Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM), Markazzo Shabab Al-Islamiyah (MSI), Muslim World League, Darul Hijra Foundations, Islamic World Committee Foundation (IWCF), Khalifa Trading Industries, International Islamic Efforts Foundation (IIEF), Darul Ehsan Foundation, Darul Imam Shafi'ie Foundation, Islamic Dawah Guidance Council, Darul Hijra Foundation, Islamic Studies, Call and Guidance (ISCAG), and Islamic Students Association of the Philippines (ISAP).

Imam Shafi'ie greatly influenced his ideology and actions. The former leader, who joined the

ASG for ideological reasons, shares his thoughts with her:

> "I felt it was my obligation to take part in jihad after Darul Imam. Jihad means fighting to regain our lost homeland and living under a purely Islamic state. We were told that it is our obligation to establish sharia law and that we are sinners unless we do that. So we thought during that time that people who do not join us are all sinners and enemies. Janjalani was telling us that God does not need numbers. He needs the pure in heart, and as long as we are sincere, God will help us."[38]

This conscious strategy of founding schools and Islamic centers in the Philippines (and other

parts of Southeast Asia where Islam already had a stronghold) was a means for al-Qaeda to

effectively expand its network and deeply indoctrinate more recruits into their grand scheme. For

Janjalani, the link to al-Qaeda was a means of amassing strong moral support and a steady flow

of resources for the local cause of the ASG. The result was a robust connection between the

core and the cell with Janjalani reportedly establishing contact with Osama bin Laden during the

former's stay in Pakistan[39] (Abuza 1993 cited in Banlaoi 2010) as well as befriending Ramzi

Yousef – the convicted mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and co-

conspirator of the *Bojinka* plots that were planned while he was in the Philippines (Banlaoi

2012).

The ASG also reportedly established ties with Jemaah Islamiyaah (JI), Indonesia's most

notorious Islamic extremist group. By 2005, intelligence officers believed that about 70 JI

members had penetrated and operated from the Philippines (Banlaoi 2010) with the help of the

ASG.[40] The JI's most infamous bomb maker – Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi – also admitted to

traveling to the Philippines for months at a time, staying in Mindanao and plotting bombings to

be carried out in the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.

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[38] Maria Ressa's interview with "Mohammad," a former leader of the ASG (2012:62).

[39] This report of Janjalani meeting with Osama bin Laden was actually contested by one of the scholars I interviewed.

[40] This was from Rommel Banlaoi's interview with Police Chief Superintendent Ismael R. Rafanan, Director of the PNP Intelligence Group, held at Camp Crame, Quezon City on April 1, 2005. See also the U.S. Congressional Report on Terrorism in Southeast Asia (2009).

Having ideological and operational ties to a larger global network of Islamic extremist movements that have operated similarly for years, one could argue that ASG operations and tactics should be fairly predictable: a series of violent, large-scale, destructive attacks on state institutions, public establishments, and/or civilians with a significant material and symbolic impact. Yet, while the ASG's tactics have been perennially violent, the specific tactics have evolved. This has led scholars and intelligence officers alike to take a second look at the movement and the seemingly more nuanced path it is taking. The next section takes a deeper look at the tactics of the ASG over time.

THE TACTICS

The ASG has historically engaged in violent tactics ranging from bombings, assassinations/beheadings, kidnappings and kidnap for ransom activities, and extortion.[41] In August 1991, the ASG unleashed its first ever act of terror on the M/V Doulos, a Christian missionary ship docked in Zamboanga, a highly urbanized province at the southeastern tip of Mindanao (Atkinson 2012 citing Banlaoi 2006; Vitug and Gloria 2002 in Turner 2003). A few months after, a series of attacks on Christian targets took place in Mindanao, including shootings of a priest and pastor, the bombing of a Dominican convent, and a kidnapping of a priest in Basilan (Turner 1995, 2003) – acts that were later revealed to be motivated by Janjalani's belief that the active preaching by Christian missionaries "gravely insulted Islam" and provoked Muslims to respond violently (Banlaoi 2006). However, it was not until a bomb exploded at the Zamboanga airport in 1993 that the group's name gained traction and widespread infamy (Turner 2003).

Bombings and kidnappings continued to escalate in Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga through the mid 1990s (Vitug and Gloria 2002; Turner 1995). The Philippine military conducted

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[41] Council on Foreign Relations, Backgrounder: Abu Sayyaf Group (Philippines, Islamist separatists), May 27, 2009. Available at http://www.cfr.org/philippines/abu-sayyaf-group-philippines-islamist-separatists/p9235. Accessed on February 12, 2013.

an intensified campaign against the extremists, claiming in early 1995 that they were able to suppress the group's operatives. They were mistaken. What followed in April 1995 was a ghastly attack on the predominantly Catholic town of Ipil, a small town in the province of Zamboanga del Sur. The group looted, burned and destroyed buildings and homes, indiscriminately killing 53 innocent men, women and children (Vitug and Gloria 2002; Turner 1995, 2003; Ressa 2012). According to a former leader of ASG, the Ipil raid was "part of a master plan that included exploiting religious and ethnic fissures to foment chaos, a formula that would later be used in plots in Singapore and Indonesia" (Ressa 2012:71). The ASG did not simply attack state or social institutions for its cause; it incited religious strife as part of its larger project to justify its cause, increase recruitment, and gain international recognition (Ressa 2012) as serious Islamic warriors.

But remarkably, after a 150% increase in attacks from 1991 to 1995 (Ressa 2012), the ASG fell into a period of silence after the Ipil massacre. Abuza (1995) offered a possible reason for this "quiet"[42] period when he described the years from 1995-2000 as one of "degeneration." Prior to 1995, Ramzi Yousef – the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing – established a base in the Philippines to train members of the ASG and set up the first al-Qaeda cell in the country (Ressa 2012). When his Bojinka plot was foiled (together with what would later be known as the 'blueprint for 9/11') during his arrest and raid of his Manila apartment in 1995, the ASG began a "steady decline" and atrophied (Abuza 2005:7). The elimination of the financial link between the ASG and al-Qaeda – a link that Yousef previously provided – led to the disruption of international resource flows from bin Laden's treasury into ASG coffers[43].

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[42] This does not mean that the ASG completely halted all its operations. There were still small-scale attacks that ranged from kidnappings to bombings, the latter suspected to be done as part of training exercises or test runs carried out by the ASG together with Al-Qaeda liked terrorist cells in preparation for major attacks like the Bojinka plot, among others (Author's interviews with military intelligence, a journalist and scholar in Manila).

[43] Philippine and U.S. intelligence reports point to the financial connections between al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamyiah and the ASG, with the first two groups funneling money to the latter through shell NGOs and organizations created by Yousef. Funds were also said to come from Islamic supporters from the Middle East and South Asia, including Hezbollah in Iran, Jamaat-Islami and Hizbul-

Without any funding for its operations, the ASG began engaging in small-scale kidnap-for-ransom activities in the late 1990s. But after Abdurajak Janjalani's death in 1999, it was no surprise that the ideologue-less ASG made its comeback through a spate of high-profile kidnappings in 2000. In March of that year, it kidnapped 55 schoolteachers and children in Basilan. A month after, it made waves in the global arena as it kidnapped 21 tourists at a dive resort in Sipadan, Malaysia. One year later, they again kidnapped 30 tourists at the Dos Palmas resort in Palawan. These large-scale, kidnap-for-ransom operations – with ransom demands reaching $1 million per hostage – skyrocketed the ASG into the most wanted terrorist lists of both the Philippine and U.S. governments. At the same time, it turned public perception of the ASG around from that of Islamic secessionists with a legitimate cause to that of ruthless, criminal bandits without a political agenda. Testimonies from former members of the ASG who defected during this period of degradation support the assertion that the ASG was driven not by ideology but by survival:

> ". . . the group lost its original reason for being. The activities were not for Islam but for personal gratification. We abducted people not anymore for the cause of Islam, but for money." (Abuza 2005:8)

> "It's not what I wanted to do [referring to the Ipil massacre]. I want to do what we have been told about the Afghan War, military operations like the NPA,[44] ambush of the military. That's okay, but not attacking civilians…the group was on the wrong path with kidnappings, extortion, and bombings…The Abu Sayyaf abused and harmed the people…" (Ressa 2012)

The labeling of the ASG as a terrorist group led to the Philippine government declaring an all-out military operation called *Balikatan* against the movement in 2002. In response to the operation, the ASG carried out a bomb attack in Zamboanga, killing two civilians and a U.S. soldier. This signified the ASG's return to bombings as a key tactic (Abuza 2005). But supported

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Mujahideen in Pakistan, Hizb-Islami in Afghanistan, Al Gamaa-Al-Islamiya in Egypt, the Islamic Liberation Front in Algeria and the International Harakatul Al-Islamia in Libya (Banlaoi 2008, citing Philippine intelligence reports).

[44] NPA is the "New People's Army," a communist insurgency group in the Philippines since the 1960s.

by the United States in terms of military troops [45] and financial aid, *Balikatan* reportedly significantly weakened the ASG. From a high of over 1000 members, the ASG dwindled to a core of around 200-400 fighters (Abuza 2005).

Despite persistent military and police operations against the ASG, the group has managed to "regenerate" (Abuza 2005) and continue engaging in violent tactics. The early 2000s saw large-scale bombings, among others the Davao airport and Sasa Wharf bombing that killed 48 and wounded 204; the SuperFerry bombing that killed more than 100 passengers in the deadliest militant maritime attack in history; the General Santos public market bombing that killed 14 and wounded 70; and the 'Valentine's Day bombings' that killed 11 and wounded many others in three near-simultaneous attacks in Makati (the central business district of Manila), Zamboanga and General Santos. [46]

Alongside these attacks were kidnappings where both foreigners and locals were taken hostage. These incidents, however, mostly ended in executions with the intent being to kill informants or intelligence officers (Abuza 2005). It was not until 2008 when a team of journalists from the Philippines' top media outfit was captured by ASG operatives that the group again turned to high profile, large-scale kidnap-for-ransom activities as part of its strategy. Given this primary tactic of choice, and the fact that the ASG has not claimed responsibility for any bombing attack since the early 2000s, [47] the group has again been widely viewed as more of a criminal menace than a serious extremist or terrorist threat.

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[45] The U.S. military sent 1,300 troops and 160 special operations personnel as part of the Bush administrations post-9/11 national security strategy or "war on terror."

[46] Data culled from Human Rights Watch and the New York Times. Available at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/philippines0707/background/2.htm#_Toc168986109; http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/25/world/asia/25iht-pirates.1.18133159.html?_r=0.

[47] There have been recorded bombings in Mindanao since 2008, but the ASG has not claimed responsibility for any of them. Intelligence records and news reports (as well as those found on the Global Terrorism Database), only "suspect" that the activities were conducted by ASG militants. According to a scholar I interviewed, these bombings are usually carried out by the ASG recruits in training as a culmination of their course on IEDs or bomb making; as a sort of test of their skills. They are not meant to harm civilians, but if ever there are people hurt, those are merely collateral damage.

Figure 2. Incidence of ASG Violence (confirmed and suspected), 1994-2011
Source: Global Terrorism Database, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism
and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland.

Note: Data and graph on the ASG were specifically generated by the author from the database
(http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/), and then downloaded into an external spreadsheet for use in this
study.

Nevertheless, as a group that has managed to conduct more than 400 attacks and acts of violence over two decades (Atkinson 2012), kill hundreds of men, women, and children, and commit acts of violence at a generally increasing rate over time (Figure 2), the ASG has not budged from its place on the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and is a staple focus of the Philippines' anti-terrorism strategy.

Chapter 7. THE ANALYSIS
Cracking the Case of the Abu Sayyaf Group

Collective action groups that are created to generate social change have employed various means of doing so throughout centuries. As groups that often engage in 'contentious politics' to resist elite power, challenge policy, or simply make a political point, social movements have engaged in disruptive, yet arguably peaceful, means. But in recent history, the manifestation of contentious politics has drastically transformed (Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1999; Tilly 2008). Social movements that once simply gathered within cordoned lines in front of public or private establishments or rallied along Main Street (or Wall Street) with their placards, may today very well move beyond burning flags to hurling IEDs at buildings, or planting bombs on commuter trains. Clearly, the spectrum of social movement tactics provides us with two categorical choices: violence or non-violence. And the ASG – as a radical, extremist SMO – has blatantly approved of the former as its tactic of choice.

As I examine the case of the ASG to understand why violence has been its fundamental means of contention, and why it has chosen to engage in the specific set of violent tactics it has carried out for decades, I will endeavor to view it as an SMO that is a product of the interaction of its *raison d'être* and the power dynamics of the multi-institutional context within which it operates. Following Armstrong and Bernstein's (2008) multi-institutional politics approach to social movements, I aim to go beyond the fundamental assumptions of political process theory as posited by McAdam (1982) that domination (i.e., the structure which is contested by social movements) is organized by and around a single source of power – the state. I also aim to move beyond the assumption that political and economic structures determine the course and dynamics of social movements, and instead consider the impact of culture and other social institutions on the tactical choices of the ASG. For a movement like the ASG, which by its very nature is not a typical social movement organization that merely protests on the streets of

Mindanao, such assumptions will not allow us to adequately understand the nature of dominance vis-à-vis state and non-state institutions in their society and how this consequently impacts the forms by which they challenge such institutions.

EXPLAINING THE USE OF VIOLENCE AS A TACTIC

If one applies the political process theory to explain the dynamics of the ASG and why it has chosen to violently challenge the status quo the way it has in order to achieve a separate Islamic state in Mindanao, the answer may seem easily discernible: the ASG has been long frustrated with the dominant 'Christian' government, which has perennially marginalized the Muslims in the south through political and economic disenfranchisement; thus, it engages in excessive violence to radically challenge the existing polity as doing so is the only way for a traditionally marginalized minority to gain attention and make an impact. But looking back at the history of the Philippines – particularly the lingering struggle in Mindanao – and taking that together with the singular culture that emanated from and was shaped by the interplay of this history with existing political, economic and social structures in that region, the answer to the question becomes more complex.

In Mindanao, domination is not organized solely around the state. In fact, while the central government oversees the region, and democratic local government structures are significantly in place, these state institutions are highly dysfunctional. They prove no match against the traditional clan structures of authority in the south, and the corruption that such a structure breeds. So indeed, while the ASG's ultimate goal is to defeat the central government and create its own Islamic state, its resort to violence and the particular tactics it has chosen is more a result of a "perfect cocktail" (Ressa 2012) of conditions rather than a mere reaction to the overreach of the state. The members of the ASG are not simply excluded from the polity or deprived by the government's decision-making processes because of being Islamic extremists; rather they are primarily disadvantaged by the rules and structures of the cultural, historical and

socio-economic conditions in the southern Philippines. They are not simply struggling for mere inclusion into the larger Philippine society as a marginalized minority, but rather looking for change in the cultural and social institutions within Mindanao. They are seeking to change the rules; to find their place alongside the traditional power holders in the region, but are doing so while having also been shaped by the very institutions they are challenging. For the ASG, achieving power and authority in Mindanao is not only a function of achieving statehood; the success of their movement depends more significantly on the control of the material and symbolic sources of power in a region beset by impoverishment and perennial strife: guns, gold, goons, and honor.

The Role of History, Ideology and Culture

The strategy of the ASG has long been "characterized by ruthlessly violent acts specifically targeted towards Christians" (Atkinson 2012:5) With this anti-Christian sentiment in mind, it can be argued that the ASG's conscious decision to engage in violence is a continuation of the *Moro* struggle for autonomy since the 14th century; a way of life that has been enshrined in Mindanao as a result of wars with the Spanish and American colonizers, and the necessary use of force by the *Moros* to defend their faith and their homeland. It can also be assumed that since the ASG was founded on the principle of *jihad quital,* waging war to create an independent Muslim state*,* its founding members felt a steadfast duty to engage in violence as warriors of Islam. As one of the former leaders of the ASG mentioned, it was their "obligation" as Muslims to take part in the jihad (Ressa 2012).

The complication in the case of the ASG is that its separatist struggle is not as ideologically pure as it seems. The movement was born and enmeshed in an environment that has had a protracted history of violence and a long-standing culture of warlordism; a culture fueled by the centuries-long dominance of feudal clans and dynasties that have gained and maintained their power through the acquisition of firearms, private armies, wealth and even

public office. According to Mercado (2010:19), warlordism in Mindanao "continues to characterize the power relations not only between clans and families but also between the central power (Manila) and the periphery." Violence is thus not only seen as a means of attaining power by the traditional Muslim clans, but also by the Muslims in the periphery – disadvantaged and disenfranchised individuals who would like to taste power, such as those who choose to join or support the ASG.

Known leaders and members of the ASG do not belong to these high profile clans; most targeted recruits are even orphans of former MILF rebels or "martyred" ASG members.[48] This conscious strategy of recruiting impoverished and marginalized orphans was shared with me during several of the interviews I conducted with intelligence officers, scholars and journalists who interacted at one point with the ASG. In one interview, it became clear that these orphans were the main recruitment targets of the ASG, as these individuals are deemed crucial to establish the type of loyalty akin to clans:

> I: So, how would you describe their recruitment process? Do the leaders launch a call for recruits? And then do these recruits study?
>
> R: There are multiple means of recruitment… There is a "push and pull" factor. There are a lot of pull factors but my favorite is their penetration of orphans, because these are the easiest to recruit.
>
> I: Because of a sense of "family"?
>
> R: Yes, those who are orphaned – when their fathers are killed, [the ASG] tells them "They [the government] killed your father. So join us. I'm your family." That was the strategy of Khair Mundos [a prominent ASG leader]… And they really train these children. He [Khair Mundos] tells then, "It's okay that you lost your father. But don't worry, your father died as a martyr and I'm here as your father. I'm gonna make you live the way your father wanted."
>
> I: So these are the orphans of former ASG members?
>
> R: I was actually just texting [mentions name of a general] and I told him, "Sir, these are the new recruits now." He said, "Wait, these surnames are familiar to me. Ask them how they are related to--" And I told him, "Sir, those men were their fathers." He [the general] said, "Oh my god. Those were the men I eliminated." This is because they had Task Force Sky[49] and they wiped out the ASG in [a particular place], right? That's our government's policy, right? All out war against the ASG. They [the government] don't know that the ASG is like a monster that sprouts two heads when you cut off

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[48] Author's interviews with a scholar, military intelligence and police officers in Manila, 27 December 2012; 2 January 2013.
[49] Not the real name of the Task Force. Name here was changed for security purposes.

one. Just like the Hydra. Then, when you decapitate it again, the two heads will become four. That's the ASG.[50]

From securing the loyalty of orphans, the ASG then expands its network by recruiting immediate family members and relatives, and then by marrying into each other's families to gain stronger ties. In another of my interviews with a journalist who had spoken to a member of the ASG, this strong network accordingly becomes a source of protection:

> I: So orphans of former members – are they being recruited actively?
>
> R: I know that that's the media line but – if I'd only go with the networks I followed from the kidnapping [referring to a specific kidnapping incident of the ASG] – these are aunts, they're extended family. So they – yes. Yes, in general I think that's the case. Because it's not even that they have to be actively recruited. It's that they have no other options. And Samuel[51] [former member of ASG] said the same thing. I said, when you go back are you gonna join the Abu Sayyaf? And he said, "Is there any other way?" He said, "If I don't do that, then no one will protect me." Understand: when there's no law and order, they need to gang up together. So that's where it is. It's gangs. It's groups. Take out the name Abu Sayyaf, this is just a group to protect each other. And to get money, right?[52]

This turns ASG into its own clan. It is an intimate group founded on kinship and intermarriages (Ressa 2012; Banlaoi 2008), and supported by a tightly knit Islamic community willing to cover up for its atrocities in exchange for material benefits. As a result, the members who have not traditionally felt a sense of protection and power by belonging to a traditional and powerful clan satisfy these sentiments by being a member of the ASG. More than ideology, this sense of loyalty and belonging acts as the binding factor that provides them with sanctuary (Ressa 2012). Therefore, if the ASG – as a clan – is to survive and become successful in achieving their aims, it is thus necessary to adopt the ways by which power and authority are customarily achieved in the southern Philippines, that is through violence and might. This is the reason why the strategy of violence adopted by the ASG cannot simply be understood through an explanation that only looks at the group's interplay with the state, as well as Janjalani's

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[50] Author's interview with a scholar in Manila, 27 December 2012.
[51] Not the real name. Name changed for confidentiality purposes.
[52] Author's interview with a journalist in Manila, 11 January 2013.

proclaimed ideological 'truths' about the group. Their resort to violence, while indeed initially motivated by Muslim separatism and *jihad qital*, is reinforced – and even demanded – by the history of a violent struggle for independence and the culture of warlordism in Mindanao; institutions that have shaped the power dynamics in their immediate society, and ultimately, their actions.

EXPLAINING THE CHOICE AND ENDURANCE OF A UNIQUE SET OF TACTICS

People not familiar with the ASG or the Philippines' historical context might predict that the ASG – as an Islamic fundamentalist and extremist group – engages in the 'usual' mélange of tactics for its terror campaign: large-scale, high profile explosions of military institutions and civilian establishments, suicide bombings and/or hijackings. But while the ASG proclaims itself as part of the global *jihad*, its continual engagement in kidnap for ransom and extortion rackets alongside small-scale bombings that are not typical of Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East or even in Indonesia, sets it apart from those groups who proclaim to espouse *jihad*. For instance, there has never been a case of suicide bombing committed by the ASG since its inception[53]. Why is this so? Why the choice of kidnap for ransom and extortion over suicide bombing missions, and why the decline of large-scale bombings in recent years?

Addressing these questions requires us to take into account the impact of multiple institutions specific to the Philippine – especially Mindanao – context on the tactical choices of the group: socio-economic conditions, existing governance institutions, cultural frames and nuances, and religious ideology or – as what will be shown - the lack of such a deep-seated philosophy underpinning their choice of tactics.

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[53] From the author's interviews. The closest that the ASG came to committing a suicide bombing was during the SuperFerry 14 bombing in 2004, the deadliest terrorist bombing in the country. Investigations led to the conclusion that an IED (in the form of a TV set) was placed on board the lower level of the ship. The attack killed 116 people including 16 children. The bomber – a member of another Islamic extremist group – allegedly planted the bomb for the Abu Sayyaf and disembarked before the ship sailed. My interviews with intelligence officers and scholars who had personally spoken to the bomber revealed that the bomber was supposed to be on a suicide mission, but that he had changed his mind before committing the attack. According to my interviewee: "It was originally a suicide bombing mission. [But the] suicide bomber made a last minute decision stating that he was not yet ready to be martyred." (Author's interview with a scholar, 27 December 2013.)

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Mindanao is the most economically disenfranchised region in the Philippines. The underdevelopment and the perpetual conflict have exacerbated the socio-economic class divide (stemming from a history of feudalism and dominance of clans), leading to extreme rates of poverty and a tremendous lack of opportunity especially for those who do not belong to the class of traditional power-holders. In a 2009 survey[54] by the Philippines' Social Weather Stations, 47% of respondents in Mindanao stated that the most important local problem in the country was the economy, which included issues of unemployment and high prices of commodities (with only 6% saying that crime – including kidnappings – was the most important a problem). Grave socio-economic conditions thus drive those at the bottom of the totem pole – the unrepresented and disenfranchised – to seek means of survival regardless of the ramifications of these means; and for those who have seen the possible material benefits of ASG membership through extortion and kidnap for ransom activities, and those who have directly benefited from them, support for the ASG is the only viable alternative in an environment that does not present them with legitimate opportunities for survival.

This demand for survival and other socio-economic grievances are consequently used by the ASG as bait for involvement and support. Since the ASG is founded and heavily dependent on kinship ties, its construction of a sense of family is based on a shared set of grievances ranging from political and economic marginalization over time. The ASG thus becomes the hero or 'Robin Hood' to those who cannot fend for themselves. As one of my interviewees states when asked why he believes the ASG engages in kidnappings:

> I: They are trapped in their situation. Just imagine Radullan Sahiron [the current nominal leader of the ASG] as the Robin Hood of Patikul, Sulu. He's their Robin Hood. Whatever he acquires through KFR [kidnap for ransom], he maintains with and distributes to the people. The people's interpretation of this is: "Hey, this is actually beneficial. He distributes the wealth. They're just distributing the wealth. Getting the

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[54] "2009 Survey on Good Local Governance," Social Weather Stations, Quezon City, Philippines.

money from the wealthy people and distributing it. But they don't know that the intention of Radullan Sahiron [is] not really humanitarian.[55]

Exploiting socio-economic grievances and the sense of family that ASG has managed to create, kidnap for ransom and extortion activities have thus become an underground "cottage industry" in Mindanao (Ressa 2012) – a small, informal, loosely-organized industry pursued by 'family' members using their own resources. The activities produce the much-needed financial resources that are used by the group not to primarily pursue their stated ideological cause or gain resources for their *jihad* – as what resource mobilization theorists might argue. Rather, the amassed resources are there to satisfy the basic socio-economic difficulties of members and supporters regardless of solid ideological ties to the ASG. The ransom money is used to purchase and distribute guns and luxury goods (motorcycles, cars and the like),[56] which ultimately become material and symbolic sources of power for the group in Mindanao. In *Moroland,* the ASG has thus become the "defender of the oppressed" (Ressa 2012: 63) and the cottage industry that they have created has become the lifeblood of the Mindanao economy. For the immediate members of the ASG and the tightly knit community supporting the group, carrying out these tactics is their only option to challenge institutions of power that have long lorded over them.

The preponderance of kidnap for ransom and extortion tactics is aggravated by the fact that governance institutions and the law enforcement system in Mindanao do not work. The Philippines has a 'no negotiation, no ransom' policy when it comes to dealing with terrorist groups and addressing related kidnap for ransom cases. The central government draws a hard line with this; yet it has been known that ransom money has indeed been paid time and time again to the ASG through informal – i.e., non-governmental – channels[57]. This speaks to the corruption that occurs, especially at the local government level in Mindanao. Elected officials

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[55] Author's interview with a scholar, 27 December 2013. Response translated from Tagalog.
[56] Author's interview with military intelligence officers in Manila, 2 January 2013.
[57] Author's interviews with military intelligence officers and a journalist in Manila, 2 and 11 January 2013.

have ties to separatist groups including the ASG, with some of them known to have been former members of these groups or to even have blood ties to the leaders or members of the ASG. As disclosed by Maria Ressa (2012) in her recent book *From bin Laden to Facebook: 10 Days, 10 Years*, the negotiations between the ASG and ABS-CBN[58] during the kidnapping of the latter's media team were mediated on the ground by the Vice Governor of Jolo, Lady Ann Sahidulla –the cousin of Albader Parad, one of the leaders responsible for the kidnapping – and the mayor of the town of Indanan, Jun Isnaji chosen by the ASG because the group "knew where he live[d]" (Ressa 2012:99). The ASG allegedly did not choose any politician from the central government to represent them in the negotiations giving the reason that "politicians take a piece of the pot."[59] The unfortunate thing is, there appears to be some truth to such a statement. Testimonies from former members of the ASG[60] and other inside sources[61] reveal that some government officials as well as military personnel indeed have ties to the ASG and have moreover gained from the ransom money and other perks of extortion activities.[62] The kidnap for ransom cottage industry thus permeates not just the ASG and its immediate support base, but also the government and law enforcement institutions that are supposedly there to counter them. Without effective law enforcement and without economic opportunities, this industry that provides a quick and rewarding alternative to poverty and powerlessness will surely persist. As one of my interviewees puts it:

> I: This is a development issue… We're like where the United States was in the 1920s. You had robber barons, the mafia – and what happened was that the FBI kicked in and started putting people away. You know, you had the Al Capones, you started running after them… That's the way I feel where we are in the Philippines now. We need law enforcement to run after corruption. We need to establish some sense of law and order in these lawless areas… So in Mindanao, in these areas – Jolo, Basilan – these are seams of lawlessness… there's no law and order… The very people who are supposed to maintain the local government – the local police, the military – are

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[58] ABS-CBN is the oldest and largest commercial television and broadcasting network in the Philippines, having around 30 bureaus around the country.

[59] From Maria Ressa's (2012) narration of negotiations with the ASG to release the ABS-CBN team.

[60] From Maria Ressa's interview with "Mohammad," a former leader of the ASG.

[61] See the work of Glenda Gloria, Gemma Bagayaua-Mendoza and Aries Rufo, "The Enemy Within: An Inside Story of Military Corruption" as cited in Ressa (2012).

[62] This was also corroborated by the author's interviews with intelligence officers, one scholar and one journalist.

part of the corruption, or are part of the lack of a system. If you can fix those... I think that's very fundamental. If we can bring development into these areas, then I think terrorism, this problem goes away.[63]

One other question remains however: on the occasions when the ASG has chosen to engage in bombings against military troops or IED attacks on civilians, why have suicide missions not been used? Islamic extremists and *jihadists* in the Middle East largely use suicide attacks as a movement tactic. In fact, 90% of recorded suicide bombings take place in Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka (Hassan 2009). This astronomical rate of suicide bombings in one region leads us to question why such a stark difference exists between Islamic extremist groups there and a group in the Philippines with an apparently similar cause. If the ASG exists to establish a separate Muslim state and proclaims to do so through *jihad qital,* then why have suicide missions – the ultimate act of sacrifice and martyrdom in pursuit of the extremists' pan-Islamic cause – not taken root among the ASG or among other Islamic extremists in Mindanao, or even in Southeast Asia? Why have bombings, in general, been inconsistently used as tactics by the ASG and further, why have kidnap for ransom activities become more prominent?

The answer lies in understanding the role of ideology – and more significantly of ideologues as leaders – in the strategic choices of the group. Maria Ressa posits that there have been four "concrete cycles of evolution since the Abu Sayyaf's founding" (2012: 86). She states:

> "From 1991 until 1998 it was largely driven by ideological goals, partly because of the funding and the behind-the-scenes manipulation of al-Qaeda. From 1998 till 2002, it turned to crime: kidnappings for ransom and extortion operations, largely because of the loss of its ideological moorings after the death of its founder. The third cycle ran from 2002 until 2008, when JI helped reorient the group again towards terrorism. During that time, it carried out the region's worst maritime attack – the Superferry bombing in 2004. A year later, the Abu Sayyaf reached out from its lairs in the south to the capital, Manila, and carried out near-simultaneous, coordinated attacks including the Valentine's Day bus bombing. Finally, the fourth cycle began with the kidnapping of Ces, Jimmy and Angel (the ABS-CBN team) in June 2008, when the Abu Sayyaf degenerated into kidnapping for ransom again" (Ressa 2012: 86).

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[63] Author's interview with a journalist, 11 January 2013.

When the ASG was founded and led by Abdurajak Janjalani, the ASG was directed by a charismatic ideologue that was driven by full dedication to their cause; it was guided by a Muslim *ustadz*[64] and warrior devoted to *jihad qital* (Ressa 2012). But upon his death and the simultaneous breakdown of the group's financial ties with the larger al-Qaeda network, the ASG lost its ideological bearings (Ressa 2012). Factionalism ensued when Khadaffy Janjalani took the helm, as his leadership qualities and ability to hold the group together using ideology proved no match to that of his older brother's skill[65].

This leadership change took ASG down a different strategic path. With the ASG broken into factions, led by men with different interests, and recruiting individuals who seemed to be merely "drug addicts and criminals"[66] not necessarily deeply indoctrinated, the ASG's activities ceased to be the ideological and political statements envisioned by its founder. At that point in time, kidnappings and extortion became rampant; and with the first two attempts of the group at large-scale, international kidnap for ransom incidents in Sipadan and at the Dos Palmas resort literally filling their coffers with millions of dollars in ransom, the perception that such activities could work to bring them wealth and power began to take root. These activities were no longer simply a means to an end, but became ends in themselves. Interestingly however, when the JI came back into the picture in 2008, the ASG reverted to bombings and even upped the ante in terms of the impact of the attacks. But again, the weakening of the group's ideological and financial ties with the larger international terrorist network upon the death of bin Laden brought them back into crime and banditry.

The 'cycles' that Ressa describe clearly speak to the significance of religious ideology as an institution that determines the purposefulness of the tactics of the group. With ideologues at the helm, the violent acts the group chooses to perform have a "higher" purpose, i.e., they

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[64] *Ustadz* means male teacher or scholar in Arabic.
[65] This was corroborated by data from author's interviews.
[66] Maria Ressa's interview with "Mohammad," a former leader of the ASG.

function as an instrument for the separatist cause; a material and symbolic weapon of the *jihad qital* against the powerful social, political and cultural institutions in Mindanao. But when the ASG experiences a dearth of ideologues providing direction, the resulting lack of indoctrination and deep radicalization of the members leads to rifts within the organization and, consequently, a series of merely criminal acts not sanctioned by the nominal head. These factions carelessly use the *jihad* as justification for their actions, when in reality they pursue such acts of banditry to gain power and influence in a land dominated by wealthy warlord clans and corrupt government officials. As Podder (2012:510) aptly puts it, "the role of religion and ideology as legitimization strategies… appears to be of diminishing significance in the *Moro* conflict."

There are no Abu Sayyaf suicide bombers because a deep internalization of the group's ideological underpinnings is absent among its members, and there is no active effort from the leadership at this point in time to achieve such a level of indoctrination or radicalization. The current structure of the ASG makes religion inconsequential;[67] and without fundamentalist religious ideology guiding its operations, we will continue to see a professed Islamic extremist group like the ASG that is entrenched in a lawless, corrupt and impoverished society carry out widespread – albeit disconnected – kidnapping and extortion rackets in Mindanao rather than al-Qaeda style terrorist attacks.

Indeed, the problem seems to be multi-institutional – developmental, cultural, historical, social and political all at the same time. Using violence is a result of an almost unconscious combination of context-specific conditions that are completely different from environments in which other Islamic extremist groups (particularly in the Middle East) find themselves. Thus, I argue that a purely militaristic approach that aims to completely eliminate them will simply be a cause of perennial frustration; for as long as the power structures and dynamics in Mindanao – and the rest of the Philippines for that matter – continue as they are, then the ASG will remain a

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[67] Author's interview with a military official, 5 January 2013.

challenge to the status quo. As long as the ASG continues to find itself entrenched in a power struggle that is founded on guns, goons and gold, without any promising non-violent alternatives for gaining dominance, then violence will continue to be its tactic of choice. And as long as its members are not provided other opportunities to better themselves socio-economically, we will unfortunately see more innocent captives tucked away in the jungles of Basilan, Jolo, and Sulu with price tags on their heads.

NEXT STEPS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS CONTAINMENT?

When asked how they think the 'ASG problem' can be contained, there was a consensus among all my interviewees: Bring development to Mindanao. There was an overwhelming belief among these individuals who had either interviewed, studied, interacted with, immersed themselves with, or even fought against members of the ASG for years, that the most effective way to halt the ASG's brand of terrorism would be to provide them with socio-economic prospects that can realistically give them an alternative to engaging in crime and terrorism. When asked about the strategy of the military against the ASG, one military official I interviewed stated that while they have an all-out war against the group the key to containing their violent actions lies in addressing the people's welfare and providing socio-opportunities to the people in the areas where the ASG operates:

> R: You know, you go after the armed group. But you remove their influence, the real influence on the people. So what we do is, we cater to the people's needs, it's just like winning their hearts and minds. We win the people over [to] our side so that we can deny them [the ASG] support, deny them space, [and] at the same time, confine them to isolated areas where we can launch military operations minimizing collateral damage, human rights violations. And that's exactly what the people would like to have. Them not being disturbed while we go after the [ASG] because this is an intelligence-driven, selective operation against a small group…
>
> But then, we had this strategy in 2005 against the Abu Sayyaf – and this is now the current strategy that we have – *Bayanihan*[68]. It is giving more importance to the welfare of the people, getting their support. Because without people's support or wherever the people will side, [the ASG] will win. So we have to win people [over to] our side by providing them their basic

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[68] The Tagalog (Filipino) term *Bayanihan* means a community coming together to be of aid to one another. It originated from a traditional practice in the Philippine countryside when mobile nipa huts were used as homes. When a family needed to move to another town or another location in the village, the entire community would come together to literally lift and move the nipa hut of that family to the family's destination.

needs…For example – it's between an Abu Sayyaf [member] and myself [a Philippine soldier]. I provide you with schools, roads, potable water, and everything, medical assistance. I don't think you, as a civilian, would choose the Abu Sayyaf who come to you and extort money from you for these resources. So it's isolating the enemy.

I: So despite this strategy, why do you think there are still those who choose to join the ASG?

R: Well, the world is not perfect... So people are still thinking that they want easy money; they can go with them [the ASG]. And they think that they can get away with it.

Indeed, providing socio-economic opportunities to the potential recruits of the ASG appears to be the logical and most direct way of containing the 'ASG problem.' After all, knowing that the original Islamic separatist cause of the group and its foundational ideology are not deeply planted in the hearts and minds of most of its current active members – and that financial gain which provides material and symbolic power is the primary incentive of the group to engage in violence today – the evidence supports the assertion that the problem can be addressed, and perhaps even contained, through socio-economic development. Nevertheless, the response of the military official above points simultaneously to the complex and multi-faceted nature of the problem – a characteristic that necessitates an equally multi-institutional response. The fact that people who mull over joining a life of banditry with ASG believe that the group will be able to get them "easy money" and be able to "get away with it" clearly suggests that without strong law enforcement and effective local governance, all efforts to provide economic development and welfare opportunities will be in vain. If the culture of warlordism and corruption remains unchecked, containment strategies through a development lens will prove inadequate.

Quelling the violence and terrorism perpetrated by the ASG requires more than a militaristic approach. It requires an understanding of the multi-layered context within which the group operates in Mindanao as well as the interplay of the multiple institutions of power against which they struggle. Only with this understanding can we begin to take the laborious steps toward any resolution to a centuries-old crisis in the southern Philippines.

CHAPTER 8.
CONCLUSION

We typically view terrorism as a combination of senseless and unlawful acts of great proportions. Since terrorist acts are committed by individuals who are armed and who belong to a supposedly massive web of conspirators, the perpetrators of these acts – terrorist groups – are commonly viewed (at least in the literature and in government/policy reports), as tightly knit militaristic organizations that belong to extensive networks comprised of rogue individuals (Guanratna 2002). This leads to the perception that formal, institutional and militaristic responses are apropos, and necessarily the most effective. Yet, it is important to note that as sociological concepts, violence and terrorism (deviant behavior in general) are social constructions (Ben-Yehuda 1993; Turk 2002). Terrorism and political violence are thus interpretations of events and their presumed causes. This is perhaps why there remains no consensus about what terrorism precisely means. As Turk (2004: 273) posits, the "construction and selective application of definitions of terrorism are embedded in the dynamics of political conflicts." The struggle involves ideological warfare: Casting the 'enemy' or the 'other' as an "evildoer" to win support for one's cause or that of the group to which he or she belongs (Turk 2004).

This then brings us back to the sociological questions posed in the first part of this paper. In light of the inability of current counterterrorism strategies in the Philippines to sufficiently quell the terrorist threat from the ASG, the country might benefit from transforming the way it views the group in relation to how it devises means of dealing with them. The analysis presented here based on a social movement framework – particularly the multi-institutional politics approach to social movements – has ushered us into a deeper understanding of the multi-layered conditions surrounding and shaping the dynamics and tactical choices of the ASG over time.

This study suggests that there are multiple institutions that simultaneously work to shape the strategic decision(s) of the group to use violence and terrorism as a tactic. The ASG feel that violence is the appropriate – and lone – tactical option for them to acquire material and symbolic power. This belief is based on 1) the obligation to continue the perennial struggle of violent separatism in Mindanao; 2) the inevitability of continuing this fight by adapting to the power dynamics in Mindanao to ensure success; and 3) the lack of alternatives to violence as means to climb out of their powerlessness, impoverishment and marginalization. The result of these factors is a mélange of context-specific conditions that produce the particular tactics the ASG has used over time. Rather than pure ideology or political opportunities determining the course and dynamics of this social movement organization, it is the lethal combination of the culture of warlordism, history of Muslim oppression, weak governance and law enforcement, and the lack of economic opportunities in Mindanao that define how the ASG plays the power game.

Moreover, the specific set of tactics currently used by the ASG (kidnap for ransom, extortion, small-scale bombings instead of suicide bombings or large-scale attacks) points to the superficial and misguided indoctrination of Islamic fundamentalism among its members and supporters. Since ideology is no longer the principal driving force of the ASG, the choice of tactics depends on the type of leader calling the shots and the level of ideological indoctrination espoused by this leader at a particular point in time. This, coupled with the need of the members of the group to attain socio-economic survival and gain material and symbolic power, spells the tactical difference. The operations of the ASG have been patently influenced by the power dynamics that operate through and around a multitude of institutions in Mindanao, rather than by its political struggle against the Philippine state alone.

Next Questions

While this study identifies and thoroughly examines the multiple institutions that have shaped and continue to shape the tactics of the ASG, it simultaneously raises other questions that require further research. One of these revolves around the measures that could effectively contain groups like the ASG. Assuming that non-militaristic containment measures do not successfully quell the 'ASG problem,' how can socio-economic development strategies – the most prevalent 'solution' suggested both by scholars of the Mindanao problem and those interviewed in this study – be tailored to address the multi-layered nature of the crisis in Mindanao? In what ways can such a containment strategy adapt to the power structures shaped by the cultural, religious and social institutions that dominate the Southern Philippines? It has been argued here that a multi-institutional strategy is needed to contain violent acts of the ASG. Yet, given the overwhelming clamor for a socio-economic approach to the problem, it would indeed benefit the ASG counter-movement to systematically and empirically consider how such a strategy can be applied, and what conditions will allow it to work in the Mindanao context. A comparative study looking at non-militaristic containment strategies against anti-state, insurgent or extremist movements would perhaps contribute to examining this question.

Another interesting question that would be crucial to further understanding the ASG and other Islamic extremist groups is one that touches on the phenomenon of radicalization or indoctrination vis-à-vis the group's network and kinship structure. Ressa (2012) argues for the need to rigorously study the social networks through which the "*jihadi* virus" has spread throughout Southeast Asia, and particularly look at how it is spreading in the virtual world i.e., through online social media. Further research on online social networks would indeed be essential to get a macro picture of the recruitment processes of groups like the ASG. But how does the network function at the micro level? How does ideological radicalization occur (or not occur) in the inner circles of the network, especially when members are tied by blood and

marriage? Is a terrorist or extremist organization that depends on kinship to establish and maintain loyalty stronger than one that is comprised of 'brothers and sisters in the faith'? Such a future project would be a fascinating exploration into how much kinship, community and family indeed influence terrorist networks compared to the prevailing explanation of deep ideological ties.

Ultimately, the analysis here suggests that in light of the unyielding and dynamic threat from terrorist networks, sociologists must continue exploring the links between the emergence and perpetuation of terrorism as employed by groups and the various institutions that shape the power structures that such groups contend with. As Austin Turk (2004) argues, it is vital to identify and understand what comprise the settings in which people come to make the choice to engage in terrorism as an option in their struggles.

It is undeniable that terrorism and political violence are tactics (Tilly 2004), and the movements that employ them seek to make claims that challenge existing institutions of power. Given the nascent state of scholarship on terrorism within the ambit of social movements theories, the time is thus ripe for fresh, vigorous, and continuous application of an alternative multi-institutional approach to examine terrorist movements. The duty is even more relevant and necessary, as we seek to provide countries like the Philippines that face perennial insecurity from such groups with a better image of the "enemy." This study hopes that it has contributed to that task so that ultimately, the space for movement tactics that hurt and take away innocent lives will no longer exist.

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