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Political Clans and Violence in the Southern Philippines

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Summary

Since 1972, a Muslim guerrilla has been waging a civil war in the southern Philippines, which has proved to be remarkably resistant to all attempts of peace. Still, under martial law, an initial agreement between the state and the guerrilla was reached, which aimed to put a stop to the violence, but which, so far, has not been realised.

Following the return of the Philippines to democracy, there have been many attempts at peace, which, in 1996, resulted in a peace treaty with the largest of the guerrilla organisations, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The leading cadres of the “victorious” MNLF became part of the political mainstream, and some of the troops were integrated into the armed forces and police.

The hitherto marginal Moro Islamic Liberation Front took over from the MNLF. In the following years, the violence escalated, finding its preliminary highpoints in several military offensives in 2000 and 2003. In addition to the growing violence between the MILF guerrillas and the state, the first years of the new millennium saw the gradual driving out of the MNLF cadres from their political positions, the majority of which have now been reoccupied by the traditional political elite. Despite numerous efforts and a large number of agreements on certain aspects of the conflict, forging a workable compromise with the MILF guerrillas will not be easy. On the margins, this organisation appears to be descending more into criminality and towards terrorism, which is scarcely connected to local concerns.

All structural conditions, which led to the rebellion in the early 1970s, remain unchanged at the start of the new millennium. The Muslim regions of Mindanaos are still among the poorest regions in the Philippines. Figures for the last ten years show that the local situation is not improving, if anything, it’s worsening. Demographically, the Muslims have been pushed back to a few core regions, where they still make up the majority of the population, elsewhere in many cases they have been reduced to a small minority among the Christian immigrants. Politically, the Muslim elite have practically no role; at best, they can hope for patronage funds in exchange for the support for the ruling elite in Manila, which they can then use in the region which they control.

This report argues that an analysis of the political and socio-economic framework of the civil war can only expose its dynamics to a very limited degree, since it ignores the microdynamics, through which it is integrated as a prominent part of a complex multi-dimensional system of violence.

In contrast to many other depictions of this conflict, violence in this report is derived mainly from the interplay between local cultural models of order and social practices, which, in the interplay with the macrodynamics of the civil war and the formal-democratic setting, in which Philippine politics takes place, leads to a violence-laden local order.

In addition to the state security forces, the militia and fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the agents of violence also include the powerful local clans and a

number of strongmen with their private armies and gangs of thugs, criminal bands, who appear to have excellent connections with politicians, as well as possibly with the MILF-guerrilla. To this might be added different forms of ethnic or religious militias, which, originally set up by the armed forces, are now more or less autonomous in their decision-making with regard to violent acts.

The main lines of conflict, in addition to the one between the state and the guerrillas, are between the local clans and the two revolutionary movements (Moro National Liberation Front MNLF and MILF), as well as between feuding clans, who fight for local political control. There is also a high level of criminal gang violence and violence connected with illegal operations such as safeguarding illegal logging against popular protest. Armed conflicts between guerrillas and state security bodies often appear to result from private vendettas between rival families. For opportunistic reasons, they are reinterpreted as conflicts within the framework of the political struggle for self-determination.

The social order in Muslim Mindanao is characterised above all else by a juxtaposition of rival clans. Thinking in the categories of the clan and the associated code of honour result, in the institutional context of the Philippine electoral democracy, in highly violence-oriented political debates, which mostly reach their highpoints directly before and after elections. Although the paraphernalia of democratic elections is widely fulfilled – emotional electoral battles, electoral advertising everywhere, a multitude of events and the common rhetorical exchange of blows between political rivals – politics in this region is to a very great extent a purely intra-elitist event between rival clans. It is also generally accepted that the local clan leader decides on behalf of the whole community. Nevertheless, elections are often won through use of extra-legal means – often including violence. Since rival clans use the same means, the result is often armed conflict, which, against the background of a distinct code of honour, mutates into years of blood feud, whose patterns of violence characterise the local social order for years to come.

The peculiarities of the Muslim regions do not, however, lie in these family and honour-related patterns of thinking and behaviour, which they share with many other Philippine regions despite some differences in detail. They also do not lie in the distortion of the democratic competition arising from the violence-oriented rivalry of the clans – this pattern is also familiar in many other areas. They lie, rather, in the fusion of this social and political order of violence with a second form of political violence not encountered in other regions of the Philippines - that of the armed struggle for independence.

Clan violence and “normal” political violence already characterised the local political order before the Muslim rebellion. The new violence arena of the civil war and its players could be used as an extra resource by the clans in the struggle for political and economic power, although they appeared to threaten the local dominance of the various clans at the same time.

As agents of violence, clans and political families can use the civil war agents in many ways, thereby masking their political dealings as civil war violence. In the local political arena, it is vitally important to be able to characterise one’s own forces as “state” but those of rival clans as “rebels” which can then be criminalised. In many conflicts, being able to

count on the help of one of the two conflicting parties - guerrilla or military or police - can be crucial. This is ensured by either corrupting the party or infiltrating them with members of one's own clan. The result is a large number of smaller or larger private armies, which, legitimised through state uniforms, stand de facto in the service of a family. This strategy of masking also facilitates better weaponry and a widening of the means for private acts of violence. The civil war could also be used as a reason for why the stabilisation of own rule is an imperative of national policy and why the providers - the clans - must be equipped with the relevant means. Ultimately, this not only escalates clan violence but also allows it, in its public presentation, to disappear behind the violence of the civil war.

There hardly seems any way out of the violence. All the same, many groups agree that targeted embracing of traditional practices of mediation and consensus-finding with modern political forms of organisation and players could be a way of reducing violence. Regardless of the formal rules of state law, many strive to overcome feuding violence with the support of traditional forms of combating violence. In addition, there is a major conviction that electoral democracy should be restricted at least in the transitional phase, since elections are considered to be triggering factors of violence and its escalation. Even if these proposals are basically held as positive, which the author does, consideration must also be given to the fact that the traditional order also possesses a high degree of internal violence dynamics to which a considerable proportion of current violence is attributable. Any return to a traditional forms of mediation and resolution must therefore be carried out extremely carefully and selectively, if it does not inadvertently want to strengthen those whose violence it hopes to end in the long term.

Overcoming the clan system is not possible in the foreseeable future, and in my opinion, it is not per se desirable either, so long as the local population see it as an adequate social order, in which they wish to live. Possible and desirable are, however, a selective reform of this order, which aims at strengthening dimensions which are culturally intrinsic, civilising and which minimise conflict. If consensual practices of determining local leadership posts appeared not only acceptable at the local level, but also had a civilising effect, their conditioned legalisation would make sense. If mediation and blood money were successful as effective mechanisms for handling feuds, it would be worth formally legalising these informal mechanisms and supporting them wholeheartedly. The stabilised common norms established here could in the medium term lead to an extensive civilisation of the social conflict resolution. An extremely positive development in recent times is that guerrillas and state players have increasingly referred to clan violence openly and in so doing have repeatedly prevented an escalation and a transformation into politically connotated violence.

The increased focus on clan violence should, however, not lead to isolated contemplation, since many of the dynamics of violence have grown out of the interdependence between the different arenas, players and forms of violence. Any strategy which aims at resolving the political conflict between the MILF guerrillas and the Philippine state, must be aware of the interdependencies between the various arenas of violence and players and must therefore develop an integrated "recipe" for civilising the violence.

In terms of the stress on reforming the local social order, it should also not be misunderstood that the political conflict between the Muslims and the Philippine state can be treated as an appendix. It likewise demands committed action. Unfortunately, despite its advantageous position, it appears that the new government lacks commitment. It is a sad fact that the problem of the Muslims in southern Philippines is only prominent on the national political level while the guerrillas are building a strong backdrop of threats supported by the selective use of violence. When such a backdrop is not there, the problem is happily ignored.

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1. Introduction

Violence in southern Philippines appears to be a fact of everyday life, more so than in many other parts of the country. For over thirty years, various guerrilla organisations have been fighting for their own state in the Muslim part of Mindanaos and the Sulu Archipelago. In other parts of Mindanaos, resurgent Communist guerrillas have firmly reestablished themselves after a long period of relative obscurity. Public building works cannot take place without their permission, businessmen cannot survive economically without paying the relevant “taxes”, and successful local politicians must find a way of living alongside them, otherwise their re-election cannot be assured or their health or lives are threatened. Other groups, the most prominent and successful being the notorious Abu Sayyaf, live behind a quasi-religious legitimation from their kidnap-for-ransom business. There are also a multitude of smaller criminal bands, which follow the traditional line of piracy or stay afloat by following other forms of armed robbery. Finally, there are the bombs which explode regularly in the towns of this region, sometimes killing innocent civilians. Usually, nobody claims responsibility for these acts, the police and military can only speculate, and the cases end up filed away unsolved.

The guerrillas face a military that commits major violations of human rights and organises ethnic militia in a traditional counter-insurgency manner, which terrorises its own people in the name of the fight against guerrillas, criminal bands and “terrorism”. In informal cooperation with various businessmen and local politicians, the military look in particular to benefit financially from the situation. Some leading military and police officers have succeeded in building up their own political power base from their military position and sometimes while still active and sometimes after having left the military, become leading local figures. There are also powerful families who when necessary also secure or consolidate their positions with violence. Anyone who dares stand up to them is living dangerously.

The dynamics on the macro level which led to this civil war and have stabilised and perpetuated it over the decades have already been dealt with in an earlier PRIF report.¹

This report looks at highlighting the many local dynamics and the network of complex interaction they have formed which gives the conflict its special form below “higher politics”. The focus on the local political level in the regions particularly affected by violence i.e. the former provinces of Cotabato and Lanao as well as the Sulu Archipelago shows just how much work still lies ahead for Philippine politics beyond the negotiations with the MILF guerrillas, if they wish to minimise political violence in this region in the long term, without running the risk of politically-tied agents of violence breaking away from this violence-structuring context. This would lead to violence becoming increasingly anomised. A further strengthening of the already considerable problem of criminal bands and

¹ Peter Kreuzer, Die Rebellion der Muslime im Süden der Philippinen, Frankfurt (HSFK-Report No. 7) 2003 (in German; Internet: www.hsfk.de/downloads/report0703.pdf).

“aimless” violence could be expected. As a result, there would be more victims than there are from the current politically-bound violence.

This report derives violence from the interaction between local cultural patterns of order and meaning and social practices, and understands it therefore as locally determined to a great extent. However, the acceptance of a particularly violent-laden Muslim society should in no way be encouraged. The majority of the local practices which promote violence originate from tradition, these, however, are not of Islamic origin, and even explicitly contradict Islam in many ways. Clan thinking and the distinct code of honour as well as tribal thinking not seldom take clear priority over the demands of the Islamic religion with respect to codes for social behaviour. The repeated fragile attempts at integrating both systems and the criticism of un-Islamic traditional practices put forward by the Islamic clergy show that there is a rivalry about the power of interpretation. Violence as a means of political conflict resolution is in no way confined to the Muslim south, but can be seen in many regions of the Philippines.

The Muslim south has many structural and cultural characteristics which can be equally found in a similar form in quite a few regions of the Philippines. Here, reference is made only to the prominent role of the political families from the local to the national level. Clans dominate politics not only in Muslim Mindanao, but also in Christian parts of the Philippines.

Political and especially economic analyses of violent conflicts between ethnocultural groups tend in many ways to explain such conflicts through universally valid causes – e.g. relative deprivation, the instinct for power of the ethnic elites or greed, which is taken as an almost reflex reaction to certain economic structural conditions. Ethnographic studies are rarely included, which could possibly connect violence with specific cultural patterns. This would contradict the basic assumption that protest and rebellion all over the world basically originate from a fixed set of causes.² In contrast, the majority of ethnological studies are hardly ever interested of integrating the systems of norms, world pictures and social practices analysed by them with the political actuality in the societies studied. Surprisingly, there are also large “white gaps” in development and cultural sociology with respect to the question of collective violence, especially in ethnically fragmented societies; violence rarely took on a central role in the analyses, but instead tended to form a marginalised set of facts. If violence were picked out as a central theme, then, in a similar way to transformation research only in the context of civil war, other forms of violence would be faded out to the greatest possible extent. Wherever violence appears, it is mainly reduced

2 This ahistoric perspective is particularly prominent in the works of David Collier and the World Bank-centred working group led by him. The analyses of these scientists concentrate almost exclusively on the comparison between plausibility and greed- and grievance-based violence (see e.g. David Collier, Anke Hoeffler, Greed and grievance in civil war, in: *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2004, pp. 563-595, Ian Bannon, Paul Collier (eds.), *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict*, Washington DC (The World Bank) 2003). In terms of methodology they are firmly fixed in the variable-based large-n-comparison, which de facto excludes any focus on the difference and individuality of cases from the start.

to instrumental elitist behaviour, the actual players of violence scarcely enter the picture, the specific dynamics remain mainly invisible, and there is absolutely no phenomenological perspective. Such deficits only first became apparent in their entirety ten years ago within the framework of a “revolution” in violence-sociology and were scaled down somewhat with a first set of new studies. The following study positions itself in this theoretical and methodological “no-mans land” which can be marked out in the border area between the three sciences outlined here.

As a basically hermeneutically conceived study, it aims to provide the best possible illustration of complexity and exposure of the multidimensionality of the conflict. It examines the multitude of patterns used by the players and the dynamics which result from the clashing and meshing of the various patterns of perception and action. In this sense, it is a synthetic undertaking which contrasts in its essence and objective with a purely analytical endeavour.

Before the political dynamics of the Muslim-dominated southern Philippines are described in the main body of this report (Chap. 3) and the approaches to solutions which emanate from the local society itself are presented (Chap. 4), the central concepts, through which the conflict can be understood – clan and clan politics – are described more closely (Chap. 2). The final chapter (5) attempts to assess the chances and limitations of various strategies of dealing with the analysed complex clan-centred system of violence.

2. Clans and clan politics

In political science, unlike in political journalism, the concept of the clan has hitherto played a largely insignificant role. Literature on clans and the associated political and social structures including the specifics of a clan-centred order of violence can for the most part only be found in the works of ethnologists focusing on indigenous social orders.

As more recent studies suggest, clans are not a phenomenon of the pre-modern world. In fact, they appear to be one way of giving structure to the social and political environment in the past as well as today. In many areas of the world, after the collapse of the real-socialist alternatives and the cessation of the at least partial determination of local and national dynamics by those of the superpower rivalry, it has now become manifest again that apparently past social orders – and this also applies to clans and ethnicity – have survived hidden under the surface of the larger ideologies and their conflict or have now been recreated. Their existence in the modern world, in the context of modern political organisation shows that they are possible answers to the specific fractures of the modern world. A political order based on the loyalty and rivalry of clans is no less plausible than one based on ethnic or religious affiliation or the Left-Right pattern found in western countries.

2.1 Clan – an attempted definition

In terms of definition, the concept of clans has to date hardly ever been established beyond pre-modern societies. A notable exception is the study by Kathleen Collins, which examines the clan-centred politics of several central Asian republics and attempts to form a theoretical discussion. She defines the clan as

“an informal organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin-based bonds. Affective ties of kinship are its essence, constituting the identity and bonds of its organization. These bonds are both vertical and horizontal, linking elites and nonelites, and they reflect both actual blood ties and fictive kinship.”³

As a rule in the more rural regions, clans are led by leaders traditionally legitimised usually through age and genealogical status, whereas in the urban regions, a clearly greater importance is attached to control of economic resources. “An extensive network of poorer relatives and kinsmen, close friends, women, youth, and children constitutes the nonelite members. Clans also cross class lines.”⁴ The exchange is based on principles of mutuality. While the clan elite are committed to welfare, the poor and marginalised clan members have a duty of unconditional loyalty.

Although clans are also political organisations, they do not originate from politics. Instead, they are basically extensive, social organisations, also active in the political sphere in the interest of their members. In clan-centred orders, an individual way out from the clan is nigh on impossible, since clans, in addition to their political function also penetrate the region economically, as well as safeguard local security and settle disputes.⁵

Clans are social organisations which interact with the state, yet instead of answering to it, they lead the way in many respects. Thereby they are able to mould a state-formation, if and when they succeed in forming an emerging or reforming state on their own model.

Of key importance to the possible organisational structure of a clan-centred political order is the fact that clans do not appear to be capable of institutional organisation on a higher level. The loyalty of the clan members applies to their clan and its leadership. Organisation outside the clan is actually not excluded *de facto*, but is always linked to utilitarian considerations. It generally takes place in the sense of a clan alliance for specific purposes and can be terminated at any time by either side, when it appears to be necessary or at least sensible in the perceived superior interests of the clan. Highly aggregated organisation is therefore always awkward.

There are two points worth stressing: Firstly, clans and the politics structured on their basis cannot be thought of in ethnic categories. Clans do not possess the symbolic re-

3 Kathleen Collins, *The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories*, in: *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 1, January 2004, pp. 224-261, quotation p. 231.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

sources available to ethnic groups to create a comprehensive “national” identity.⁶ Farah points out that ethnicity is often falsely brought in to explain the reaction of traditional groups to modernisation and deeper state penetration, and that “(t)he overemphasis of the role of ethnicity has unfortunately resulted in the total disregard of the sub-group units, such as descent units within the structure of the ethnic group. As a ‘social unit’, the former can also be responsive to mobilisation.”⁷

Secondly, clans and clan rule should not be grouped together with clientelism, patronage, corruption, mafia structures or similar. These kinds of phenomena find links, of course, in a polity characterised by clans, but they are not necessarily connected to clan rule, nor are they not present in other political forms of order and rule.

2.2 Characteristics of clan politics

Political clans strive to infiltrate the institutions of the state and convert them into institutional hangers-on of the clan. They prefer other clans or clan-like organisations as political opponents, since they too have a vital interest in stabilising the order in which clans have a key political position. As a consequence, in the political process, clan alliances with the same goal, i.e. to make clan rule a lasting political principle of order, frequently find themselves opposing competing forms of political organisation.⁸

Clan politics always undermines democratic rule owing to the extensive control the clans have internally and their capacity to appear as collective players externally, the members of which cannot “change”. A democracy based on the will of the individual is in fact no longer possible, since the individual acts as part of the clan. Democratic order, therefore, would “function” best as a relative balance of competing clans. However, not only democratic rule, but also in many ways authoritarian rule on the national state level is hindered by clan politics. Clans undermine authoritarian rule, in that they protect their networks against attempts of external control. To the extent that the autocratic ruler is dependent on the support of the clans – which he is, particularly at the local level of politics – he loses his autonomous decision-making capability, the logic of the autocracy is filtered through that of the clan rule. If the autocratic ruler tries to seize power in a more extensive sense, he must overcome the basic structure of the clan rule – the permanent competition based on local control between a larger or smaller number of clans. In more specific terms: he must shut out competing clans as political players, what makes an opposing clan alliance highly probable. In both cases, clan rule undermines the chances of the state to be able to reach through at the local level and therefore also the building of a modern state bureaucracy.

6 Ibid, p. 234.

7 Mohamed I. Farah, *From Ethnic Response to Clan Identity: A Study of State Penetration among the Somali Nomadic Pastoral Society of Northwestern Kenya*, Uppsala (Almqvis & Wiksell Int.) 1993, p. 27.

8 Collins, see above (footnote 3), p. 237.

2.3 Blood feuds as a social and political practice

Despite the vast number of clan organisations, for the purpose of this study there is one important factor they all have in common, which unites this social organisational form with regard to its behaviour of violence: the feuds which are frequently thought of and practised in the form of blood feuds. Otterbein defines the blood feuds as “(a) kind of armed combat occurring within a political community in which, if a homicide occurs, the kin of the deceased take revenge through killing the offender or any member of his kin group.”⁹ Clan feuds follow strict rules, which, however, legitimise practically all forms of “dirty war”, when the purpose is one of revenge. Ambush killings, like other forms of deception or poisoning, are legitimate responses to aggressive acts by the enemy group. Nevertheless, in many clan-based feuding societies blood money is also an option, which the clan of the murdered victim is entitled to, the payment of which can end a feud.

The (blood) feud must definitely be seen as an attempt to regulate and minimise the use of violence. It generally prevents extensive belligerent confrontations between the clans, which aim at completely annihilating the adversaries. Of course, there are victims, but these tend to be small in number and do not threaten the survival of the clans.

Blood feuds create enormous group pressure, which firmly welds the in-group to a common fate. As Lewis in the example of the traditional Morocco deduces, they are integrative on the local level, they have a high degree of social legitimacy and acceptance and also characterise the economic order. Blood feuds form “an integral part of social patterns, prefigured by custom, confirmed by ever-present dangers, and accepted as tradition.”¹⁰ Escaping from their logic is not possible for the individual, since he would then not only be completely without protection, but *de facto* also without means. The basic logic applies as much to modern-day clan-centred societies, as it did in Ancient Greece: “The system of tribal blood feud worked on the basis of a balance of terror. Individual safety was guaranteed by the clan or not at all.”¹¹

The high intensity of clan loyalty also means that supra-clan organisation is extremely fragile and such loyalties always remain subordinate to the interests of the clan. Since and to the extent that clans are relatively small social organisations, local societies of multiple, competing clans emerge, which, in many cases, become tangled up in armed feuds. As a result, a large number of uncoordinated, armed paramilitary organisations are located within a relatively small area, which, in turn, increases the probability of frequent, violent clashes.¹²

9 Keith F. Otterbein, *Clan and Tribal Conflict*, in: *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, Vol. 1, San Diego inter alia (Academic Press) 1999, pp. 289-295, quotation p. 289.

10 William H. Lewis, *Feuding and social change in Morocco*, in: *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 1961, pp. 43-54, quotations p. 43.

11 Jonas Grutzpalk, *Blood Feud and Modernity: Max Weber's and Émile Durkheim's Theories*, in: *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 2002, pp. 115-134, quotation p. 121.

12 Otterbein, see above (footnote 9), p. 293.

3. Violence in Muslim Mindanao: the microdynamics of a complex system of violence

The violence in Muslim southern Philippines can generally be explained through the macrodynamics of the conflict between the Christian-dominated state with its neo-colonial attitudes and the Muslim minority, who have been demanding their right to self-determination in the parliamentary system through protest and also, since the start of the 1970s, through violent means. In recent years, increasing attempts have been made to tie the conflict into the dynamics of international “Islamic” terrorism.

Both attempts at explanation are justifiable, yet they cut short the dynamics, which led to the start of the conflict, as well as the dynamics, which affect its permanence. In particular, attempts which grant the international “Islamic” dimension an increasingly prominent role risk confining the conflict to a marginal phenomenon, like the link between the Islamic-oriented guerrillas, the MILF, and Jemah Islamia which operates in several southeast-Asian countries.

Those, too, who centre on the political dimension of self-determination, describe the civil war in categories, which are not only felt to be inadequate by many players, but which also compartmentalise part of the violence into inappropriate cognitive categories.

In contrast, the differentiated analysis of the agents and the dominating forms of violence, as well as the patterns of interpretation used by the local political players shows that historical forms of violence still have great weight today. They are embedded in the violence between a guerrilla and the state bodies and distort or shape this to their own image. This report aims to emphasise these historical forms of violence and their significance in the current system of violence. Before this analysis of the microdynamics of violence, this study will take a look at the course of the political conflict between Muslim guerrillas and state,¹³ so that in the final part of the study, light will be shed on the integration of the various levels of conflict.

13 For the macrodynamics of civil war, see Kreuzer (footnote 1). A significant part of the information used in this study was obtained from interviews conducted over the summer of 2004 in Manila, Cotabato City and Iligan. All quotations have been made anonymous. Interviewees include: Agujah, Mario Joyo, Member of House of Representatives Akbayan; Ampatuan, Zamzamin, Executive Director Office of Muslim Affairs; Baccani, Benedicto, Prof. Notre Dame University Cotabato, Director Center for Autonomy and Governance NDU, Legal Adviser RLA and ARMM-Government; Buat, Musib, Member MILF Peace Panel; Candao, Abas, Chairman Bangsamoro Development Agency; Col. Garcia, Danil, Vice Commander 6. Infantry-Division; De los Reyes, Ike, Leader RPM-M (communist guerrilla); Hassan, Hatimil, Speaker Regional Legislative Assembly (ARMM); Juanday, Danda, Executive Director Bangsamoro Development Agency; Kamlian, Jamail, Professor MSU, Iligan Inst. of Technology; Karon, Hadja Bainon G., Regional Secretary ARMM Department of Social Welfare and Development; Leyretana, Virgilio, Deputy Presidential Assistant for Mindanao and Deputy Cabinet Officer Regional Development XII, Office of the President; Liao, Antonio, Engaged in resolving long-standing Ridos; Lidasan, Amirah, 2004 Candidate for House of Representatives Suara Bangsamoro; Lim, Hadja Maria Lourdes, Regional Director Region XII National Economic and Development Authority; Lingga, Abhoud, Executive Director Institute of Bangsamoro Studies;

3.1 The Muslim rebellion against the Philippines

Our Muslim people are facing a war of annihilation aimed at their total subjugation, destruction of social structure and political system. In fact, the war is surrounded by organized and systematic conspiracies to expel the Moro Muslims to the far-flung areas where they will be deprived of justice, equality, freedom, self-determination, and honorable humanitarian life.¹⁴

The armed conflict between the Muslim guerrillas and the Philippine state began with the declaration of martial law in 1972 by President Marcos. Despite repeated attempts to settle the conflict through negotiation, it continues today and has so far claimed up to a hundred thousand lives, according to various estimates. During the conflict hundreds of thousands have been exiled in their own country and tens of thousands have fled to neighbouring Malaysia, where tens of thousands continue to live today. Human rights in the region have been hugely violated by the state security forces and the guerrillas. Compared to the rest of the country, the region clearly has the lowest socio-economic development. The conflict was unscathed by the re-introduction of democracy following the fall of Marcos. The civilising potential of this form of rule has come to nothing here. The violence continues to this day. Examining the causes of why the conflict broke out, the following points stand out:

1. A fundamental demographic and socio-economic marginalisation of the Muslims in their homeland has been taking place since the beginning of the 20th century, where they, in many cases, make up only a minority in the meantime.
2. As a reaction to this, a seemingly traditional collective identity, comprising all Philippine Muslims, has developed over the decades, whereby they are described as “Moros” in a “hostile” Christian country.
3. The education of young Muslims at Arab-Islamic and state Philippine colleges since the 1950s led to the development of Muslim counter-elites, who, from various ideological positions, questioned the legitimacy of the Philippine rule over the Muslims in the south and equally the rule of the traditional Muslim elites and who were prepared to use radical means to achieve their goals.

Lopa, Rafael, Executive Director and Assistant to the Chairperson Benigno Aquino Foundation; Lt. Col. Del Prado, Press Officer 6. Infantry-Division; Mastura, Ishak, Secretary Dept. of Trade and Industry ARMM, Mastura, Michael, Member MILF Peace Panel; Quevedo, Orlando Beltran Archbishop of Cotabato Catholic Church; Quijano, Franklin, Mayor City of Iligan and Chairman GRP Peace Panel for negotiations with the RPM-M; Rodil, Rudy, Historian MSU, Iligan Inst. of Technology and Member GRP Peace Panel for negotiations with the MILF; Ruiz, Noel, Program Manager LEAP Program USAID; Sema, Muslimin, Mayor Cotabato City; Timovera, Bobby, Co-Editor Mindanews; Vitug, Marites, Editor in Chief Newsbreak.

14 Hashim Salamat, State of the Bangsamoro Struggle for Independence Address (delivered 13.11.2001), in: Hashim Salamat. Referendum: Peaceful, Civilized, Diplomatic and Democratic Means of Solving the Mindanao Conflict, Darussalam, Camp Abubakre As-Siddique (Agency for Youth Affairs – MILF), 2002, pp. 4-15, quotation p. 7.

4. In the 1960s, the political competition between the two big parties on the national level (the Nacionalistas and the Liberalistas) escalated at the national level. As a consequence the already high level of political violence escalated to new heights. In the Muslim-Christian regions of Mindanao this violence often, but not always took place along religious lines. Finally, the declaration of martial law in 1972 closed off all legitimate arenas for political protest against the often neo-colonial policy of Manila.

With its history of intense immigration, growing marginalisation and destruction of traditional structures of order, the southern Philippines, often also imagined as the “Wild West” of the Philippines, resembles the countries and regions, termed “frontier societies” in literature.¹⁵ In these regions power often makes law, since order appears not to be firmly fixed, giving strong personalities the opportunity to ascend to local positions of power based on violence.

The hypothesis of “democratic civil peace” derived from the theory of democratic peace whereby democracy constitutes a civilising power superior to all other forms of rule, should have provided some hope after the return of democracy to the Philippines in 1986. The fall of Marcos brought, however, a spring of convergence lasting just a few months. The euphoria disappeared as quickly as it arrived and the day-to-day life of low-intensity warfare returned once more. Fidel Ramos, Aquino’s successor to the office of president, was the first in 1993 to bring about a stable armistice and in 1996 the conclusion of a peace treaty with the MNLF, through which many elite guerrilla cadres were integrated into the political system and several thousand combatants were integrated into the armed forces and police. The integration of the MNLF was successful without significantly changing the existing political system – new institutions, in particular, were set up between the local and national level, which could be used as patronage networks by the former guerrillas, for which the latter *de facto* gave up all “political” demands, i.e. the securing of traditional land rights of the indigenous groups, social justice, political independence.

Such success on the one hand corresponded to failure on the other: the hitherto second-class guerrilla organisation, the more Islamic than nationalistically oriented MILF, which had split off from the MNLF at the end of the 1970s, advanced quickly to a “complete replacement” of the demobilised MNLF. In terms of organisation and military might, it is clearly superior to the now peaceful MNLF. Further more, it is a lot less dependent on international support than the MNLF, who used the political might of the OIC and individual Islamic countries more than its own military forces to add weight to its demands.

The MILF which was openly sceptical and disapproving of the “Final Peace Treaty” concluded between the MNLF and Philippine government until now proved to be “indi-

15 See e.g. Ken Jowitt, *Ethnicity, Nice, Nasty, and Nihilistic*, in: Daniel Chirot, Martin E.P. Seligman (ed.), *Ethnopolitical Warfare: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions*, Washington D.C. (American Psychological Association) 2002, pp. 27-36.

gestible” for the Philippine system. Despite a large number of agreements and clear convergences between the conflicting parties in recent years, attempts to annihilate the MILF militarily have been renewed with great regularity.

Each offensive led to massive expulsions, to the destruction of whole villages, to the traumatising of thousands of people. Development barely exists, since the money available is not enough to reconstruct the villages destroyed during past fighting. Each offensive, always accompanied by intense human rights violations, brought the people back close to the guerrillas’ argument, that, the rule of the Philippines over the Muslim areas of Mindanaos and the Sulu Archipelago ultimately constituted neo-colonial foreign rule based on and aimed at exploitation.

All previous attempts at conflict resolution have not addressed a central question, which is also extremely significant, since the public arena in the Philippines is strongly Christian: “how Islam should coexist with the state. There was no resolution on how we look at traditional structures, that have been lost. Maybe there was something that was deeply in Muslim’s consciousness that were not served by this agreement (of 1996; P.K.).”¹⁶ Neither in the Third Republic (1946-1972), nor in the post-Marcos era (since 1987) have there been any political mechanisms, which would have prevented the Muslim south being exploited along the lines of internal colonisation and the Muslims becoming demographically marginalised through the targeted immigration policy of the Christian Filipinos. In the Fourth Republic (since 1987), in contrast to the late Marcos years, there are, however, a multitude of negotiation and contact institutions, in which representatives of the opposing parties sign agreement after agreement, although here again such agreements regularly come to nothing with parallel military incursions.

In general, responsibility for the recurring bouts of violence cannot be ascertained. Often the agents of violence and their motivation remain largely in the dark, and in many cases, it remains unclear who in government gave the order for action, and whether such an order was indeed given. Equally blurred are the agents of violence, who the armed forces profess to haunt and to whom, conversely, the MILF leadership often ascribes the responsibility for assassinations, acts of terror and murder. Many of them appear to be linked to established political forces in some roundabout way. De facto until now it has been enough to say that the lamentable acts of terror and attacks could have been committed by the guerrilla units, so as to legitimise the counter-violence of the state. Recurring counter-interpretations, according to which the state security services themselves are behind many of the acts of terror – lately prominently expressed by the rebels of the summer of 2003¹⁷ – are left hanging, without ever being seriously examined. Attempts at explanation – where they exist – regularly come to nothing.

16 Interview, Manila, 1 June 2004.

17 In the summer of 2003, there was a short-lived attempted coup by a few hundred soldiers and officers, who occupied a large shopping complex in Makati district in Manila. In addition to other critics of policy and military leadership, they declared that some of them had been ordered to carry out attacks on

In the framework of a simple confrontation between guerrilla and state, these phenomena of interdependent arenas of violence can scarcely be explained in rational terms. They are only comprehensible as multiple sub-aspects of a complex system of violence in a broader context, through which the local political order is structured and linked to the national (and sometimes also transnational) level. Violence is not a phenomenon typical only to the conflict between guerrilla and state, but an everyday phenomenon in the region, just like in other regions of the Philippines. The local political system in the southern Philippines comprises a host of quasi-autonomous agents and various arenas of violence. Even the successful elimination of a guerrilla organisation through integration of the elite cadres into the existing political system would have at best only a short-term positive effect.

3.2 Politics and violence in the southern Philippines

Eric Gutierrez calls Muslim Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, in particular, “Battlefield[s] of the Warlords” and his colleague, Francisco Gonzalez, characterises the local political elite as “Sultans of a Violent Land”¹⁸. Both images refer to the fact that a presentation, which anchors the violence in the region exclusively between the Muslim guerrillas and the Philippine state, hugely distorts the actual events. The political conflict between the guerrillas and state can indeed be analysed in isolation from a political science perspective. However, as social practice it is interwoven with a multitude of other violent conflicts and the players active in these give it its specific character to a great extent.

Clan policy is central to understanding the microdynamics of civil war, which, on the surface, presents itself as a rebellion of the Muslims against a Christian state. Clan-politics in the Muslim-dominated territories of Mindanaos and the Sulu Archipelago can be summarised as follows:

1. Clan structures penetrate the formal institutions and, in part, make them incapable of action, because they above all serve to satisfy the needs of their own clan. The aim of political action is to extend the power of the clan. The consequences include election rigging, major exploitation of official positions and widely expanded patronage networks in favour of the own clan.
2. Long-term institutionalisation beyond the clan is not possible, since the clan and its interests are the superior criteria for political, economic and social action. Outside the clan, therefore, power is extremely fragmented, its concentration is only possible temporarily in the form of advantage-based clan alliances.

mosques but that they had refused to obey such orders. They also argued that the bomb attacks in Davao were to have been initiated by the military secret service itself.

18 Eric Gutierrez, *In the Battlefields of the Warlord*, in: Eric Gutierrez et al., *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in the Southern Philippines*, Quezon City (Institute for Popular Democracy) 2000, pp. 39-84, Francisco L. Gonzales, *Sultans of a Violent Land*, in: Eric Gutierrez et al., *ibid*, pp. 87-143.

3. Since violence represents a common means of securing and expanding the power basis, the leaders of political clans/families are always, to a certain extent, warlords. The relationship between the clan leadership and members is hierarchical, just as the relationship between the ruling clan and the ruled local people.
4. Traditionally, violence is structured and limited because the logic of the feud threatens an extremely high price for each act of violence. This results in fear-based as well as advantage-based avoidance strategies. In the case of the feud, there are elaborate mediation processes, which serve to limit the violence. Some of these civilising segments of the feud have been partially undermined within the framework of social change and modernisation, which has resulted in eroding the limits of violence.
5. Clan feuds cannot be resolved within the state system, since social norms are so strong that, in the case of conflict, they can be asserted without problem. It has to be pointed out, that more often than not, the state cannot provide no credible alternative of “fair” conflict resolution anyway.
6. State actors are, nevertheless, involved in many ways in settling feuds. Barangay leaders,¹⁹ mayors or governors then act upon a different basis of legitimacy. Their authority as mediators is then actually based on the recognition of the primacy of the traditional mechanisms in contrast to the modern state mechanisms and their will to act in the sense of traditional mediators. These processes atone for the deeds according to traditional law with blood money, that must be raised by the collective – the individual perpetrator is not punished.

In civil war, clans are positioned as follows:

1. Clans act on all sides of the civil war in order to maximise the safeguarding of their interests. They at times even seem to support the guerrilla and act simultaneously as representatives of the government.
2. The guerrilla is both the opponent of the clans and their ally. The old MNLF aimed partially at disempowering the clans und extensively reforming the local ruling structures – without this, however, ever congealing into a clear political programme. After several earlier waves of cooptation, the important leading cadres of the organisation were integrated into the system with the peace treaty of 1996. In recent years, clan logic has proved itself to be stronger than the revolutionary impetus. The MNLF cadres still remaining in the system – of which there are relatively few – act as strongmen under strongmen and hardly fight for structural reform, but for stabilising of their position in the system and the development of an own political family.
3. Individual state players are often involved in feuds. There is then a risk that they use the means available to them (police, CAFGU²⁰ etc.) for their own purpose. This process

¹⁹ Barangays are the lowest unit of state administration.

²⁰ The CAFGUs (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit) were recently renamed the CVOs (Civilian Volunteers Organization), although in general language the term CAFGU is still mainly used, and will be used throughout this report. The CAFGUs are a successor organisation of the Integrated Civilian Home

is encouraged through a) the politicisation of the security bodies, which are answerable to politics on the local level, and b) the practice of installing one's own relatives in as many relevant positions as possible, so that, if necessary, they can resort to units they themselves control.

4. The actions of the guerrilla unit are, in many ways, also mixed up in clan politics. In the organisation itself, clan loyalty and organisational loyalty appear to compete, in which clan loyalty not seldom appears to take priority. Part of the violence between guerrilla and state can be meaningfully understood as part of clan politics, in which the modern institutional set-up masks the fact that rival clans fight each other. It can be useful to present these kind of clashes as political conflicts between the guerrillas and state. Therefore they can at times have huge effects on the dynamics in the political arena. In recent times, a very welcoming new orientation can be found here which strives to separate the forms of violence cleanly from each other and thereby prevent escalations through the interdependence of the various arenas of violence.

The following pages give a detailed presentation of the local interactions: They outline the players, differentiate the often overlapping lines of conflict and study the complexity of the social and political order on which the specific behaviour is based.

3.2.1 The agents of violence

There is a large number of different agents of violence in the Muslim-dominated regions of Mindanaos and the Sulu Archipelago. These are:

1. The armed forces, the national police and their assigned paramilitary units, the CAF-GUs. The militia are controlled and armed by the armed forces and local politicians, although, in many cases, they have transformed into semi-criminal bands who operate almost independently or in the service of local politicians and/or the big landowners, and who in return for payment or at their own expense take on a variety of assignments from safeguarding illegal logging to hit-and-runs.
2. The MILF, a strong Islamic guerrilla organisation, who want an independent Islamic state for the Moros and their armed forces, the BIAF (Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces). These comprise around 10,000 to 15,000 men, they are organised militarily, although they appear to have lasting discipline problems. Loyalties are personalised, i.e. if individual unit leaders leave the organisation, all their fighters under them tend to follow. The loose form of organisation and the inability of the central level of leadership to instil strict discipline are probably also the reason why individual segments of the organisation have wandered off into various forms of criminality. On the fringes of the MILF the line with organised criminality is blurred.

Defense Units (ICHDF) initiated by Marcos. These units are responsible for thousands of massacres, hit-and-runs, torture and rape.

3. The Muslim clans led by Datus²¹ with their private armies of at least several dozens of armed men. Powerful clans can easily arm several hundred men in situations of crisis. These players use violence in very different areas. Even if the distinctions are blurred, the basic criterion is to distinguish between political violence and violence which results from the logic of honour- and feuding-culture. The cycles of political violence mainly follow the rounds of elections in the Philippine democracy, whereas the second type of violence follows the dynamics of the blood feud. Blood feuds are not only conducted at the elite level, but can be found on all levels of society.
4. The local Christian or Muslim rulers, who can best be described as “strongmen”. Both groups have their own private armies, who are not answerable to any other command. These strongmen can have very different origins. The Christians are sometimes former members of the police or military, who, in active times, were able to use violence to their advantage such that on leaving service they could assume local power positions as civil politicians. Muslim strongmen sometimes have a career in the MNLF behind them, from which they have been “bought out” at different times by the government. As a service in return for leaving the guerilla, they were often given political posts at the local level and/or economic rights, for example logging-licences. The resulting combination of military, political and economic power provided some with the basis to secure their slice of the pie permanently.
5. Armed Lumad organisations on the fringes of the ARMM, who, having emphasised for decades the needs of their population group through peaceful means, now increasingly appear to be ready, to consider violence also as a means of politics. The Lumad are the poorest and most disadvantaged population group in the southern Philippines, they are the non-Islamic natives of the region, whose rights to life were violated, and continue to be so in many ways, by the Christian immigrants, much more so than the Muslims. To date their fight has contrasted with that of the Moros through their readiness for peace. Since, however, there have so far not been many signs of success and the interests of the Lumad are under threat of becoming side-railed in the negotiations between the government and Muslim guerrillas, a stronger military Lumad organisation is becoming noticeable. Currently, this appears to be taking place, in particular, within the framework of the various communist groups, who operate in the Lumad territories (NPA and RPM-M) and who integrate willing Lumad into their ranks.
6. Ethnic militia, who were set up by the armed forces as part of their anti-communist counter-insurgency strategy in Lumad-territories (mainly the feared Alsa Lumad)

21 Traditionally, the Datu title is granted to descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. These days, the title is used inflationary and most often describes people who hold economic, political and social power. The Datus can, therefore, be categorised into old and new Datus. The former can trace back their origins over hundreds of years and derive their claim to leadership from Mohammed. In fact, the latter also try in many ways to develop some kind of “tradition-derived” legitimacy via marriage and similar strategies, although de facto their title is owed to their political ability to assert themselves during the restructuring of the social order of the late Spanish and American colonial time.

with the aim of fighting the “left” Lumad groups. As with many Christian militia, who operate with the support of the security services on the edge of the Muslim areas, these militias de facto constitute to a certain extent criminal organisations, who carry out a large part of the dirty work in return for immunity from prosecution from the security forces – for example cleansing the “ancestral land” for the purpose of economic exploitation.

7. Criminal bands, who, in many ways, intervene in the conflict dynamics and, in a roundabout way, appear to be linked to many other players. Whether and to what extent connections also exist between local politicians and the military, on the one hand, and bands specialised in kidnap-for-ransom activities, on the other, is an unanswered question – not least because leading band members are either not caught or, if they are caught, they are shot so they cannot provide any information. If one of them is arrested, it is almost certain that he will soon escape, if he is not shot trying to do so.
8. “Agents of violence by chance”, who, without feeling part of any of the above groups, become agents of violence through the dynamics of violence and the general availability of weapons. By way of example of this rather amorphous group is the case of a former MNLF commander, who, as part of the USAID-financed LEAP programme²² aimed at recivilising combatants, became leader of one of the many locally set-up MNLF-states²³. When government troops searching for MILF units bombed the territory of this MNLF state, his son died and storehouses set up for the community with USAID funds were destroyed. As a reaction to this, the commander did not turn to the government or the MNLF. “He on his own undertook retaliatory action against the Philippine army. Of course the Philippine army responds, classifying him as a bandit or as a terrorist. [...] there is an arrest order for him. He has not joined the MILF but he has been sleeping with his M-14 and he is prepared to take action against the military.”²⁴

Note that the MNLF does not appear anywhere on this list, the reason being that in recent times it has hardly played any role as an organised political force and, as an organisation, no longer has any control over agents of violence. That does not mean that MNLF cadres do not crop up as agents of violence. It means, however, that, in recent years, leading MNLF-cadres have gained or ensured a large part of their political power from building up person-related power structures rather than from their MNLF-membership.

It is already apparent here that the “official organigram” of local politics in the southern Philippines at best confuses the observer and at worst leads him up a dead-end street. After thirty years of civil war, the fought-over region has been split into units and between players, who, in this form, find themselves in no political map. Gutierrez’ statement on

22 LEAP: Livelihood Enhancement And Peace Program.

23 This is the official (!) name under which these local projects are run by USAID.

24 Interview, Manila, 29 May 2004.

Sulu applies equally to the other regions: “The province can be divided into strongholds controlled by either military, different MNLF commanders, and the assortment of local strongmen and families. The invisible boundaries are indelibly marked and delineated, however, in the minds of the people.”²⁵

3.2.2 *Lines of conflict in the Muslim south*

3.2.2.1 Conflicts between Muslim tribes

The two major Muslim rebel organisations, the MNLF and MILF, are to a certain extent organised along ethnic boundaries. The MNLF is mainly dominated by Tausug, and the MILF by Maguindanaoans. After the MNLF-reformist-group set up in the 1970s, was reintegrated into the political system, Hashim Salamat, the leader of the MILF for many years, was married to a Maranao, eventually succeeded in bringing many Maranao into the MILF. Although the MNLF as well as the MILF profess to speak for all the Moros/Muslims, they are, however, de facto perceived as different ethnic configurations and act at least in part as representatives of their ethnic groups’ interests. The traditional elite, too, lean towards a stronger connection with the interests of their particular ethnic group than those of the Moros as a whole. This basic ethnic pattern, however, is only realised in local politics in isolated instances, since the limits of the clans’ political influence, like that of the guerrillas, lie practically totally within the territories of “their” group. Control over certain areas is not up for debate, since all tribes occupy and control relatively clearly delineated territories.

The conflict is only visible on the general, cross-tribal level. It specifically concerns control over all the political means, which are institutionally anchored and allocated at the regional level of the Moros, i.e. in the institutions beyond the provincial level, in particular, the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), the SPDA (Southern Philippines Development Agency) and, over a wider area, the now defunct SPCPD (Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development). After being dominated for a few years by the MNLF (and principally by Tausug), the established, traditional Muslim elite succeeded in recent years in winning back control to a large extent and marginalising the MNLF cadres. The transformation of the remaining MNLF cadres into locally established strongmen and the return of the clans to the regional level have neutralised the tribal dimension. Both the traditional elite and the MNLF cadres now act in the interest of the national government, as one knowledgeable local observer critically underlines: “of course the ARMM has been hijacked by the traditional politicians and rebels-turned-traditional politicians, sort of two classes – it’s the same, you know. They are subservient to the national government, they don’t question.”²⁶ The growing dominance of the clans and the transformation of individual MNLF cadres into local elite have to a large degree weakened the potential for highly inter-ethnic conflict lying dormant in the design of the regional

25 Gutierrez, see above (footnote 18), p. 46.

26 Interview, Cotabato City, 7 June 2004.

institutions. Nevertheless, there exists in all regional institutions, to a limited extent, conflict between the tribes for possession of the offices. This will likewise have an effect on the development of designs for integration of the MILF.

3.2.2.2 Conflict and cooperation between political clans and the two revolutionary movements

Traditionally, policy in the Muslim south is made by the leaders of the political clans, who de facto exercise almost total power over certain territories. These clans can use their people as a resource in elections, since they can guarantee certain victory to politicians with ambitions for national positions in the areas they control. In return, they are integrated into the patronage networks of the politicians and receive in a number of ways funding from the state coffers which they can use to strengthen the clan and safeguard their rule. Clan members often find themselves on all sides: many as politicians, others in local administration, some in the armed forces, the security services, and also in guerrilla units. The guerilla also appears to be supported in various ways by material from the powerful clans. Some commanders with clan connections reciprocate the support in problem cases (e.g. clan feuds), for which they provide armed aid.²⁷

The primary loyalty of all clans lies with the interests of their own family. Therefore they aim at the best possible control of their territories and the people living there. In this way, a clan might safeguards itself and its economic interests, for example, in the face of the MILF guerilleros, by employing MILF guerrillas on the banana plantations he operates. The guerilleros can thereby earn their family an income. The guerillos, however, being armed, are not just normal workers, they can also provide military protection of the plantation. This way the employer ensures the loyalty of the entire guerrilla organisation, which (also) rely on such help to provide for its members. At the same time, the clan leaders protect their interests in the political arena by providing the mayor and, if possible the Congressman as well as the governor or vice-governor of the province.²⁸

Just as “multitrack” is the Mastura family: Datu Michael Mastura, a member of the constitutional assembly from 1971, and later a member of parliament (1987-1995) and deputy minister of the Ministry of Muslim Affairs, as well as member of the SPDA is one of the members of the negotiations panel of the MILF guerrillas,²⁹ while his son Ishak Mastura acts as Secretary of Trade and Industry for the ARMM and other family members safeguard local control over the occupation of mayor posts: Mayor Armando Mastura as

27 Information from several interviews, June 2004.

28 Interview, Manila, 29 May 2004.

29 His brother, Datu Toca Mastura, was MNLF commander at the start of the 1970s, when Michael Mastura was actively engaged in “official” politics. He turned his back on the organisation in 1976 and took his units to Nuling, where he took up the post of mayor and safeguarded the town against attacks by the army with his own private army. Another family member, Datu Guiwan Mastura, was likewise commander on the side of the MNLF until 1973.

Mayor of Sultan Mastura. His brother, Toca Mastura, was elected mayor of Sultan Kudarat and his daughter, Shajida Bandila, his deputy.³⁰

The Ampatuan clan has exceptionally close connections with the local military (6th Infantry Division),³¹ which are not only to ensure that the elections go the way they want them to, but also for the purpose of militarily safeguarding local control of the clan over the territories and in the town of Shariff Aguak itself. The head of the clan, Andal Ampatuan, who had previously represented the interests of the family at the national level as a member of congress, won in 2004 the battle for the governor's post for the second time; a son-in-law, Datu Bimbo Sinsuat, was elected his deputy. His son, Zaldy, was elected mayor of Shariff Aguak, a nephew, Hadji Akmad B. Ampatuan, his deputy. Family members, Andal Ampatuan Jr. and Sajid Ampatuan were elected in Datu Unsay, and in Mamasapano, Akmad M. Ampatuan and Nuali Ampatuan were elected.³² In Ampatuan town, two Sangki brothers, also related to Gouverneur Andal Ampatuan, beat off the opposition. The former justice minister, Simeon Datumanong, a nephew of Andal Ampatuan, won his seat in national parliament. At the same time, the family appears to have supported the MILF over the years at least with food supplies and tolerance of several bases on their territory, until in 2002, after the murder of Andal Ampatuan's son, Saudi, they turned against the guerrillas.³³ Similar complex safeguarding strategies have been around in almost all traditional elite families since the start of the rebellion in the early 1970s. At times, many of them had at least one or more active members among the ranks of the guerrillas.

Although the powerful Muslim families use the conflict as a resource and try to instrumentalise it for their political purposes, they also see, however, the MNLF and now the MILF as a clear threat to their political hegemony. Some of them see a danger to their traditional secure position as aristocracy in the ideology of the MILF and reject the MILF version of Islam in favour of a stronger integration of Islam with local practices and traditions, which would also ensure them a dominating role in the future.

30 Youngest governor in RP; Quezon goes for Poe, in: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 May 2004 (www.inq7.net/reg/2004/may/22/reg_5-4.htm).

31 One of my interviewees explained to me this pattern of reference as follows: "As you know the military is very much supported by these political elites. In this part (of Maguindanao; P.K.) the stories persist about military getting some money from this governor (Andal Ampatuan; P.K.) -- monthly in the millions. If you are commander of the sixth infantry division, yes, you get monthly pay. And in exchange for protection." (Interview, Cotabato City, June 2004).

32 Several other members of the Ampatuan family were elected as members of the local barangay councils (Sangguniang Barangay): In Mamasapano Bahnarin and Noroding Ampatuan, in Sharif Aguak Zainal and Cashmer Ampatuan, and in Datu Unsay Asim Monir Ampatuan, Pandag Salibo Ampatuan, Dao Duma Ampatuan and Abdullah Kalianget Ampatuan (www.news.ops.gov.ph/armm-dir.htm). Currently, the mayor of Sharif Aguak, Zaldy Uy Ampatuan, stands as candidate in the elections for the post of ARMM-governor, which are to be held in August 2005.

33 Interviews in Manila/Cotabato June 2004.

This can also lead to informal alliances with Christian politicians (during the 70s and early 80s between Ali Dimaporo and Ferdinand Marcos, and in the not so distant history with Maria Clara Lobregat and Emmanuel Pinol), when these are seen as opportune for the purpose of obtaining power. The traditional Muslim elite acts in two ways: as agents of the interests of the Muslims, and as agents of their own “class” as well. It is this quest for continued economic and political power of a ruling class which the national government has known how to use for decades.

The aim of securing power also explains why, in certain circumstances, the Muslim guerrillas are perceived as being more of a threat than the Christian elite, who rule in the neighbouring provinces. Neighbouring Muslim and Christian elites try, as a rule, not to get under one another’s feet, but instead respect each other’s areas of influence.³⁴

Conflicts between the guerrillas, on the one hand, and family alliances, on the other, can be extremely violent. However, the open level of violence is rather low. Below the surface, however, these lines of conflict most probably play an important role in some of the conflicts apparently dealt with between armed forces and state security bodies, insofar as all parties use their connections with agents of violence for the purpose of promoting their own interests. Here, too, the violence escalates before elections, since, at this time, the clans fight to gain possession of the political offices, which regularly costs the lives of dozens of people. Occasionally however, it may also lead to alliances aimed at shutting out political rivals or their expulsion from certain territories. From the outside it looks like a complex picture of mutual deception – the only constant of the alliance system is the paramount importance of the individual clan’s interests.

3.2.2.3 Traditional clan feuds

Clan feuds can be found in all Muslim-Mindanaoan regions and, under certain circumstances, are even responsible for the majority of local social, and also political violence. Many of the interviewees stressed that a large part of the so-called police or army actions against rebels of various provenance were “battles” in long-lasting clan feuds, in which one side has the opportunity to use the state’s resources of violence for their purpose. If their opponents have clan members in the guerrilla, they can, in turn, mobilise them. These kinds of conflicts have not only a high potential for violence, but they also have a drawn-out quality.

Clan feuds also frequently result from the dynamics of the Philippine electoral democracy, when rival clans fight for “electoral victory” in an election district. In such a fight, it is not a case of winning over the majority of the voters, but winning the political victory for their own clan with all means, which appears a lot more effective with money and weapons than with words and political programmes. Just like in many other regions of the Philippines, the three Gs (guns, goons and gold) dominate here. One of my respondents argued openly,

34 Interviews, Philippines, May/June 2004.

“clan politics is very strong, also democracy is a form of legitimacy for power-grab. Meaning, if you have money, you have guns, goons and gold as they call it the three Gs, you can aspire for power. Elections, especially our type of election, wherein the Comelec³⁵ is perceived as corrupt and can be bought, then elections are bought. We don't have European style democracy, wherein people really respect the will of the people, the mandate from the people. [...] In our case, in our area it is more of a power-grab.”³⁶

3.2.2.4 Criminal band violence

Muslim-Mindanao is a region in the Philippines with a high level of band violence, which expresses itself in abductions for the purpose of blackmail, and also in violent robbery attacks. It can hardly be disputed that a large part of the abduction bands would have no chance of escaping the state security forces for long, if they did not have excellent local contacts and were tolerated by at least some of the political players in the territories they control. The reasons range from money-making through using this group's potential for violence for their own purpose to the commitment to traditional bands of the clan.

Less obvious is the violence which stems from the dealings of the groups, who specialise in the illegal quarrying of raw materials. The illegal logging, in particular, appears to be an important source of income, from which many of the local elite, but also former cadres of the MNLF and the state security forces profit. Conflicts over this source of income often result in violence towards material things, but also towards people, which, in a complex way, is connected to the political problems. Information on this is, however, exceptionally scarce and, therefore, must be speculative here out of necessity.

3.2.2.5 The uniform as a mask of the local dynamics of violence

The fact that violence and its players are often not what they appear to be based on their official name, will be illustrated in the following examples. One of my interviewees, who has been active between the fronts in the region for years, illustrated my question on the role and function of local violence with the following stories:

“To survive as a power-figure – the feudal aspect – you have to maintain your armed followers, because given the fact, that your adversaries are also people who love violence, you have to protect yourself. So in effect, you have to establish your band of armed followers. Or essentially your relatives, who are your most closest supporters. As you grow into power [...] you end up getting some political position or being affiliated with some political position, be it Barangay official, a mayor, a governor or a board member or something of that sort, which would also legitimize your entitlement to [...] military or police protection. And somewhat to that effect, it pays to have relatives in the military. And the fact that you have access to uniformed services sort of legitimizes your hold on power. So your enemies or your political adversaries, if they [...] choose to fight you, they end up not only fighting your regular followers, but also the people that you have contacted, these being the uniformed services. Either police or army. In effect for the army or the police to justify this, they will classify those other groups as rebels. When you are being classified as rebel, you have no other choice but to really affiliate yourself with either the MN or the MI (MNLF and MILF; P.K.)”

35 The state electoral commission.

36 Interview, Manila, 27 May 2004.

“There is N.N. (name changed; P.K.), who is trader, and I know the local army commander, I ask that some of my relatives be integrated in the armed forces. And I supply them with the firearms. [...] I give them my fire-arms. They end up taking the slots reserved for the legitimate MNLF former combatants. So they go and train, they become members of the Philippine army, of the national police, but the Christians don’t trust them either. And they just say: ,Well you just get a personal security (job; P.K.). You go back to where you came from [...] .‘ So they come back to me. And I say: ,Well, what are you doing here?’ and they say: ,Well, we’re now your security.‘ And I say: ,Great! I have just legitimized my private army.”

“Even in the police integration process this could be bought. A policeman earned maybe 11.000 a month and they are giving something like 200.000 pesos to get the slot. The salary is not the problem, they don’t care about the salary. The fact is, they can go back into their area legitimately carrying fire-arms. So they could not be classified as private armies because they are police-forces or they are army-troopers but they are identified with a political figure or their sponsor. And this is why you have other people refusing to surrender their fire-arms.”

“CAFGUs at one time could also be sponsored by the mayor. And that’s a legitimate authority, right. But the problem is that the mayor happens to be the political warlord or that feudal warlord. So in effect he is legitimizing his private army. That’s the reason why the others don’t want to surrender their firearms.”³⁷

The messages underlying these stories are identical: State agents of violence only seem to be agents of the state, whereas in fact they act as private armies of local warlords. Many of the skirmishes between the military or police/CAFGU and the guerrillas stem from the logic of the violent clan conflicts. All “state” players have to a great extent their own interest to apply a political interpretation over essentially private wars, firstly because it would be costly in political terms to report the truth; secondly because, for example, in case of injuries or fatalities the state payments would be refused, if it concerned a private war. Only a deployment against guerrillas or criminal bands guarantees claims for health-care, pensions and other state-payments. In brief, it can be stressed that “the uniform is being used to mask the micro-violence. [...] In terms of local violence, that’s how it is done. Because you have to legitimize your operations. [...] getting away from being prosecuted in court.”³⁸

In the past, evidence could almost never be offered of this ‘disguise’, since at least the armed forces were generally trying to present the conflicts as military confrontations with the guerrillas. Since the summer of 2004, however, there has been an interesting, hopeful, new pattern that aims to differentiate clearly the various forms of violence. Military and guerrilla spokesmen have many times unanimously agreed that clashes should be interpreted as components of “private” feuds and not in a political context.³⁹ The Executive Director of the Office of Muslim Affairs, Zamzamin Ampatuan, also stresses that “un-

37 Interview, Manila, May 2004.

38 Ibid.

39 See, e.g., Manila works to keep Peace Talks on Track with MILF Rebels amid ‘Skirmishes’. In: Philippine Daily Inquirer, (www.inq7net.ph), 30 August 2004; Chancellor Palpatine, Local Monitoring Team asked to probe armed feud in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town, 17 November 2003 (available on the official website of the MILF www.luwaran.com).

less we can look at these things as a mere 'local conflict', and isolate the incidents from the peace talks, there is a danger that the peace negotiations will again be derailed".⁴⁰

In the same way, this is illustrated by Ghazali Jaafar, one of the leaders of the MILF, when he concedes that the MILF has major difficulty in preventing its own troops from fighting when the families of MILF members are involved. Feuds in the past "escalated to intense armed confrontations between government troopers and MILF guerrillas".⁴¹

3.3 Characteristics of the local political order

3.3.1 *The relevance of different collective identities within the framework of local politics*

I think Shakespeare came to the Philippines or came to Lanao. You have real life Romeo and Juliets in Lanao. Boy from one clan meets girl from another clan, but the two clans are bitter, they are too bitter enemies. If you go to Lanao, they will tell you that [...] the two clans [...] will agree to kill their respective sons or daughters. That is the Maranao. [...] There are cases, when the boy and the girl, they left Lanao, went to Manila and they sent people to look for them in Manila and stab them. [...] Now it's a bit changing now. They adopted the exile formula. You will never, never set a foot in this city. You've been disowned. [...] it's how it's done. Christians, or Christian man marry Muslim woman. The clan will shoot the Christian guy.⁴²

3.3.1.1 Bangsamoro

Of course, the identity as Moro/Muslim (Bangsamoro) is important in the struggle against the Philippine state, although this unifying identity is built on a base with distinct centrifugal tendencies.

Bangsamoro (nation/community of the Moros) unifies the various Moro groups only to a small degree. It is a category of collective identity directed purely externally without much internal content apart from the commonly perceived history of suffering. It is relevant politically in order to be heard by the Philippine government or the international donor community and to negotiate for resources. In terms of content, the bands are weak, the Muslims see themselves as members of their clans and ethnic group and only secondary as Muslims. One local observer states:

"this people are Bangsamoro, when they are facing the Christians. But they are very much fragmented among themselves. [...] Culturally they identify themselves first as members of this cultural group, then as Moslems. So you see how important is place. Because of very strong clan- and group identity. And even positions in government and policies are most

40 Zamzamin Ampatuan quotes from: Manila works to Keep Peace Talks on Track With MILF Rebels Amid 'Skirmishes', in: Philippine Daily Inquirer (www.inq7net.ph), 30 August 2004.

41 Ghazali Jaafar, quoted according to Romy Elusfa, MILF says it's hard to eliminate 'rido', in: Mindanews 11 November 2004 (www.mindanews.com/2004/11/10nws-rido.html).

42 Interview, Manila, May 2004.

often based along this cultural grouping, along cultural lines. If you have a Maranao governor he will fill in the autonomous region with Maranaos even if they are not qualified.⁴³

However, the Bangsamoro identity, or rather its Muslim components, plays a particular role in the internal conflict between rival elite groups, especially the MILF and the traditional elite. The MILF, like the reformist Ulamah on the fringes of the organisation, have been striving for decades for the Islamisation of the elite and the people – Islamisation in the sense of a reformation, through which Islam is to be cleansed of local practices and traditions contradictory to the “pure teaching”. This aims to break the dominance of primary collective identities and to establish the common religion as a central, common point of reference. Thereby the demand for leadership by all those Datus, who gained their status during the last century only, would also be declared null and void. The traditionally legitimated old Datus could be bound to obey the prayers and rules of behaviour of the Koran, which would clearly enhance the position of the Ulamah.⁴⁴ The vision of the MILF is most closely related to the Islamic components of the Bangsamoro identity. Based on interviews and the texts of Hashim Salamat, I would assume that the MILF identify Bangsamoro with the Muslim people, which excludes the long-term resident Christians as well as the Lumad.⁴⁵

Representatives of the MNLF retreat to the formula that anyone living in Mindanao before 1946 counts as a Moro,⁴⁶ which would recognise part of the Christians and all Lumad as Moros. However, this historic-regional identity is fiction, since, as before, the MNLF’s political fight de facto concentrates exclusively on the Muslims and non-Muslims are neither represented in the organisation, nor do the MNLF cadres push for their representation in the regional committees.

3.3.1.2 Ethnic identities

Ethnic identity is particularly important in relation to the “revolutionary” political struggle, and less seldom in relation to local politics within the framework of the Philippine parliamentary system. It has scarcely any significance in the latter because, as detailed above, the territories of the various ethnic groups are relatively clearly delimited and the relevant demands generally recognised, so that practically no points of conflict arise. As already repeatedly illustrated, this is a different matter in relation to the two rebel organisations of the MNLF and MILF, who, in large parts, represent different ethnic groups.

43 Interview, Cotabato City, June 2004.

44 At this point it is worth stressing that the actual knowledge of the Koran and of the problems with its interpretation in the region are very low. There are practically no Islamic students. When Shariah courts take place, they work de facto in a slightly changed form of traditionally legitimised rule and add their judgements in this tradition, too (interview, Cotabato City, June 2004).

45 See e.g. Hashim Salamat, *Referendum: Peaceful, Civilized, Diplomatic and Democratic Means of Solving the Mindanao Conflict*, Camp Abubakre As-Siddique (Agency for Youth Affairs – MILF) 2002.

46 Interviews, Cotabato City, June 2004.

In “ethnic neutral”, i.e. mixed areas, too, “wars” can break out between representatives of different ethnic groups, which, however, in the true sense are seen as clan wars, in which the adversaries only stem from different ethnic groups by chance. In such a “war” in 2003 14 people who belonged to two different clans died in just one day after an argument between two fishermen, members of both clans, escalated.⁴⁷ In such cases, ethnicity is generally not the triggering factor, but at best has an exacerbating effect on the conflict.

3.3.1.3 Clan identity

The social and political identities continue to be imagined in the context of the clan structure in Muslim Mindanao. The rhetorically prominent identities as Moro or Muslim follow in second place. One of my Mindanaoan interview partners explained that

“Clan politics is still very strong. Your affiliation to your clan, to your family is still more important than your affiliation with the other groups, because if something happens to you, then the only people you can turn to is your family, your clan. So you don’t abandon, because that’s your support group. That’s your natural group. And if you don’t have that natural group, anybody can, with the security situation in the south, anybody can kill you. Nobody will take up your corpse, nobody will take care of your family [...] At the Moro level [...] you can’t live without your clan because it’s your formal identity. It’s your roots.”⁴⁸

In his view, clans are held together by blood ties:

“Blood. Then the social protection. Group, the group. The protection of a group. That nobody can touch you, because you belong to a group, to a family, to a clan. Like Sicilian mafia. Where you belong to a country, you feel invincible. Nobody touches you, because you are a part of a clan. It has evolved in a form of protection. For personal security at the same time for social need.”⁴⁹

Total control of the clans at the local level applies equally to the old as well as the new clans: “(l)ike the datus of old, they command their respective followings and control territories unmarked on any map or government document.”⁵⁰ The Datu-centred clan rule is, however, characterised to a significant degree by the formal characteristics of the political system of the Philippines. It is not, that formal democracy stands in the way of a comprehensive, violence-based exercise of power by the elite families, but rather it promotes certain forms of elite competition. The constant inter-family rivalry for political power and resources

“triggers a cycle of violence involving families and local leaders. The institutions used to resolve leadership conflicts – elections – become an arena for playing ball or squaring off, resulting in confusing alliances and many pitched battles for local supremacy. [...] Any local leader with a command of supporters will discover the increasing utility of violence. A reputation for violence becomes both capital and basis of economic power. Under such conditions, it becomes easy for one to reinvent himself as a new warlord. Violence becomes an inevitable instrument of governance and the settlement of differences. [...] A position in gov-

47 See, e.g.: 14 Dead in Muslim tribal war. In: Sun Star. (www.sunstar.com.ph) 27 January 2003; and: Tension grips Dapdap in Balabagan. In: Mindanews (www.mindanews.com) 27 January 2003.

48 Interview, Manila, May 2004.

49 Ibid.

50 Gutierrez, see above (footnote 18), p. 81.

ernment brings access to sources of patronage that can be used to enhance local power. It also facilitates control of the economic levers [...] . Those positions are gained through elections, which naturally become a focal point of conflict. [...] Local police forces and even many MNLF fighters align with whichever family or alliance is a protagonist in an election.”⁵¹

Political rivalry is competition between families and clans. Owing to the “democratic” character of this rivalry, the rival clans are, however, forced to win elections – by whatever means. Where a clan clearly dominates, it is enough to have people in the polling stations who complete the voting cards for all voters. In other cases, enormous pressure is sometimes exerted and often support is ensured through armed violence. As a result, there are large numbers of fatalities and injuries, where elite families come head to head in their attempts to secure or extend power.

Although in view of the many fatalities and unstable alliances, it may at first glance not appear to be the case, this system not only has an extremely high internal stability, but is also scarcely questioned externally. Inducements to change through the national level are sought in vain: “the national government just allows the perpetuation of the system, because it also benefits out of it in terms of ‘They deliver votes for you’. You know, they support you. That’s what happened in the last election. Ampatuan delivered really huge chunks of votes in Maguindanao for the president.”⁵²

3.3.2 *The essence and order of the feud*

The feud is not a political, but an extensive social phenomenon, that, in certain circumstances, also falls into the political sphere. It is perhaps the most central principal of order in local society in the southern Philippines.

Feuds are fought out on a matter of honour, described by the Maranao as Maratabat.⁵³ The code of honour is “a ‘system or way of life,’ it permeates all concepts in the Maranao’s personal and social behavior.”⁵⁴

The main task of the individual is to maintain the honour and power of the clan and, where possible, to extend it. The collective and the individual cross over in the service of

51 Ibid.

52 Interview, Cotabato City, June 2004.

53 Many of the details may be unique to the Maratabat of the Maranao and cannot be transferred to the other tribes. The fundamental logic and the resulting patterns of action are, however, also basically characteristic of the Maguindanao and Tausug, as many interviewees have confirmed. In contrast to the other groups, there exists for the Maranao, at least, a rudimentary research status.

54 Claribel Bartolome, Maratabat and Rido: Implications for Peace and National Development, in: Mindanao Journal, No. 27, 2004, pp. 32-111, quotation p. 47. Bartolome provides a good list of the sparsely available literature. The majority of the following remarks are based on her work and several of my own interviews. In addition, reference is still made to Kiefer’s 30-year-old study, in which the social system of the Tausug is highlighted in detail. Rido has only recently become a topic of social scientific research. The first major conference on this topic, where a number of studies on local dynamics and the interplay between rido and political violence are to be debated, will be held in early June this year in Davao.

the individual for the ascriptive collective. Whoever tries to circumvent this system, or avoid its requirements, runs the risk of becoming completely and permanently excluded from the local social order.

Even if individual clans are not inclined to meet the requirements of the feuding order, they are often forced to wreak revenge through the expectations of their social environment, to restore family honour and be able to continue as socially accepted members of the community. Murder as a matter of honour often appears to be committed through social pressure.

The blood feud works as a binding mechanism of social order. Within the clan, it requires an extremely high degree of integration and homogeneity: “relatives of the disputants would close ranks to provide their kin members necessary support as laid down in their system of *katetebanga* (mutual aid), *kapamadgadata* (mutual respect) and *Kapanin-indegan* (mutual defense).”⁵⁵

The code of honour takes precedence over all other potentially competing patterns of order. So, recourse to the state legal system is in fact possible, but, owing to the normative order, it is in most cases *de facto* excluded, since it violates the code of honour.

Maratabat causes many Maranaos to mistrust not just the state laws. The Islamic laws are also broken through the strength of the Maratabat, if, for example, certain punishments of the Sharia are not used, since they would otherwise expose the judge and the perpetrators to revenge.

Contrary to the intuitive assumption, the frequency of feuds does not appear to diminish simply with the progress of modernisation/education. Claribel Bartolome makes the probability of becoming actively involved in feuds dependent on the following factors:

- the size and status of the clan,
- the superiority of the weapons (control over private army),
- the orientation towards tradition “Maranaos who cling more deeply to tradition, especially to social hierarchy based on *’bangs’* (royal origin), have greater tendency for maratabat outbursts.”⁵⁶

Paradigmatic clans, to which all three criteria apply, are the political families, which dominate local politics.

The violence-escalating elements of the feuding logic could become more prominent in modern society, since the traditional authorities, to whom the function of mediator is ascribed, have lost in many cases their power and, in particular, their moral authority through modernisation and social change (new elites, new values, new weapons etc.). Many local elite try to counteract the growing disfunctionality of the feuding order in modern social and political contexts, by taking up old, passed-down processes and rituals

55 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

of mediation. In the process, state law is often also broken by state players to facilitate locally acceptable (i.e. legitimate) solutions. One mayor who involves himself actively in such attempts at mediation, stresses that state law is inadequate since legal actions are not normally concluded because witnesses will not testify. To this extent, every attempt to resolve feuds in other ways is welcome, even if it means breaking state law.⁵⁷

“Creative”, culturally legitimate possible solutions for the violent and confrontational *ridos* are, however, not only sought by NGOs and state reform forces such, but also the guerrillas themselves:

“And the MILF even with so much firepower that they have, still is [...] that problem of settling *rido* (feuds; P.K.). They are also involved in settling *rido*. [...] The MILF in areas where they are dominant also influence the governance machinery already and therefore they act as police in the area. And when the *rido* occurs, they at times are mandated to prevent or settle the *rido* even. And the MILF, having that political infrastructure already, is also open to settling through litigation. And so in the hinterlands of Lanao, when there are people who are aggrieved, they complain that they file is already filed with the MILF. And then in that way things are settled.”⁵⁸

All players accept *rido* in their actions as a social pattern of order and want simply to capture the escalatory tendencies in institutional forms, so as to avoid recourse to violence in favour of mediation. The fact that most players pull together here also shows that the alternatives of state law and the associated institutions are seen as extremely deficient and incapable of reform.

3.3.3 The essence of power and authority

Political power in the Philippine Muslim south is highly splintered insofar as the whole region is, to a large, extent, divided into small territories measuring not more than 30 by 30 km, each controlled by one clan. At the same time, it is highly centralised, since most clans exercise almost unlimited authority over the areas and people they control.

In the political struggle between the clans, no superior loyalty appears to be discernable, to bind the players into a common collective good, such as the welfare of the Muslims or the Moros. The formation of a political bloc is likewise non-existent. Politicians choose the blocs solely according to political opportunity and change them whenever it seems reasonable to do so. The only stable element is the clan, whose interest enjoy top priority at all times. Alliances are frequent, yet arise exclusively out of opportunistic considerations and are therefore fragile. It is only logical that politics is characterised by a high degree of mistrust. Even the allies are mistrusted, since experience has taught that allies (including oneself) can terminate the alliance at any time. The practice of changing and fluctuating loyalties is a central part of the commonly shared, local, political experience.

57 Interview, Iligan, June 2004.

58 Ibid. This opinion is also confirmed by representatives of the guerrillas themselves, see e.g. Romy Elusfa, see above (footnote 41).

Organisations outside the clan are very loose. Discipline and organisation are strongest at the small group level, which is responsible to and loyal to one personal leader, never, however, an institution. This applies also to both guerrilla organisations, the MNLF and the still active MILF, and also to criminal organisations such as the Abu Sayyaf, which is split into several groups centred about one person, and as a whole, is best characterised as an alliance. The top commander level always has a precarious grip on the organisation, since it rests on the personal loyalty of the commanders at the lower levels which is never secure and always depends on the specific situation.

From a normative perspective, the most problematic element appears to be that power and authority are, to a great extent, amoral categories. They are scarcely bound by ethical restrictions, insofar as the central duty of an individual is to promote the interests of the clan – by whatever means. One respondent stated that the only thing that counts is the maximising of the clan's power. If this is done through unfair means, then so be it.⁵⁹ There are only a few restricting rules apart from caution - the weighing up of benefits against cost and the general mistrust which characterises political rivalry. The idea of rule-bound, restricted competition is alien in the local political framework. Domains are recognised for reasons of effectiveness, if both sides accept that a fight would do more harm than good. If one side, however, sees significant advantage then there are no principal restrictions on the actions which help maximise this advantage. Another analyst familiar with the conflict for decades, supports this theory in reference to the loss of moral authority of the traditional elite under the Tausug. He argues that a collapse of the traditional loci and patterns of moral authority which are anchored in the traditional Datu system can currently be seen. The new Datus, which have, in many cases, come to power as a result of their superior firepower, do not have the same respect and moral authority as their predecessors, who based their leadership position on the descent of Mohammad and, therefore, via "the books". The central role of the old Datus – the authoritative determination of moral and political order – has not been taken on by any other institution, which has resulted in a moral vacuum, in which various, opportunistically motivated strategies of legitimising social and political action compete.⁶⁰

It is above all power itself which also legitimises power in the eyes of the people:

"In areas like this [...] you have to be like a warlord to be respected. [...] It's a very feudal system. What's one [...] you have to exact fear from your constituents. It gets you respect. Number two it's again economic power. It has nothing to do with what your position is with respect to particular things. This never works here. So its guns, gold and goons. The three Gs."⁶¹

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Interview, Manila, May 2004.

4. Ways out of the violence

4.1 Alternative orders for the future: seen from a local perspective

The clan order has survived extensive, radical social and political change: the emergence of modern revolutionary organisations, the centralising efforts during martial law as well as the return to democracy and the building of a political level between the provincial and national level, which possesses its own legislative and executive. At this meso-level, they also have to deal with ever larger and changing numbers of state development bureaucracies of various origins. The clan order also survived the generation change, during which an older, in many cases poorly educated leadership elite was and is being replaced with a modern elite partly educated in universities at home as well as abroad. Finally, the clan order remains firm despite the massive waves of immigration, despite the omnipresence of the armed forces, despite the universal circulation of modern mass media, which suggest a quite different world. Still, the region is divided to a large degree into different territories controlled by individual family clans. In-between, there are “neutral” and fought-over regions, in which an unstable combination of rivalry and cooperation appears to dominate (e.g. Cotabato City). Short-term changes cannot be expected, neither in the direction of the depersonalisation and institutionalisation of political power, nor in the direction of a stronger Islamisation of the political order.⁶²

What, however, are the medium and long-term alternatives to the continued existence of this order and the inherent dynamics of violence? The answers supplied by the local players are surprisingly similar here despite the many differences in the details of their basic angle of approach.

One of the younger intellectuals and political actors of the Muslim elite explicitly referred to the Malaysian model. He favoured a conscious retraditionalisation of the local society, which, in particular, emphasises local plurality and the self-determination of the different ethnic groups of Muslim belief. He argues,

“we have to recognize the diverse content, social content, ethnic content of that society and even within that (traditional; P.K.) structure. [...] Given new options, like an option for reconstructing traditional structures [...] Muslims can rebuild their own, but rebuilding in a sense that it has to be strongly rooted in that tradition, rather than putting up a totally new structure. [...] In our case, maybe there will be some renewal of our understanding of what those structures were, looking at how they existed and looking at how they can be rebuilt in conformity with realities with political systems like we talk of democracy, how traditional structures can coexist with democracies”.⁶³

62 Here, it would also miss the purpose to place hope on new generations, since many of the young representatives of the Datu families are systematically gradually integrated into the existing system. One of my informants described even university politics on the level of student parliaments as following the traditional pattern of “guns, goons and gold”.

63 Interview, Manila, June 2004.

In his vision Islam takes on an important, but restricted place and is filtered and adapted through tradition (Adat). Since such an order, in contrast to the current Christian hegemony, would be legitimised and normatively stable, it had the chance to be accepted and effective as a collective identity and to withstand the concept of a uniform Islam.

“We have to look at that structure as something that can withstand a global religion even with our sense of wanting Islam be part of that structure. But we want to be it a structure that can define its own, other than be dictated by a globally conscious and assertive cultural norm. Because culturally it has to be independent. [...] Its cultural norm is a localized norm. It’s not something global because we want to see the uniqueness even in relation to other Muslim structures elsewhere. [...] Culturally it (Islam; P.K.) is local, religiouswise it can be a universal faith – any faith can be universal – but culture can be assumed in distinct forms rather than in uniform.”⁶⁴

The interviewee stressed the need for strong leadership, which, in the modern sense, works efficiently and with results. Criticism of the quasi-authoritarian relationship between the elite and the mass does not exist. In contrast, hope is aimed at a leader who, through his own model, is capable of leading the Philippine Muslims as one on a path of modernisation and development. The models are Malaysia and Singapore, personified in the strong figures of Mahathir Mohammad and Lee Kuan Yew respectively.

“That one Muslim leader is a performing leader, having a concrete agenda about how to solve this problem, how to take on the Muslim concerns. One may be the like of one say Mahathir that has really delivered to his own constituents. That will be the leader that will fill in, if there will be any new leadership. [...] The respect for tradition and modernity – looking up to modernity as a hope for Muslims.”⁶⁵

A prominent local politician from Maguindanao argued along similar lines, although in a clearly more traditional language. He stressed that the Philippine culture is paternalistic in a fundamental sense.

“We respect our father. Whatever our father says, it goes. And the Filipinos as a family, you know, the father dictates the family. The family is a small governance. Spread out everywhere in the Philippines it’s paternal. There must be some power imposed in the family, so that the children will not make foolishness. So, if we adopt the Western concept of Democracy even children can sue their father. It will not work here. So the government must have that authority to discipline the children. [...] Ultra-democracy will not work, and I think that this what we have here, we are copying the West and it doesn’t fit with our culture as a family-oriented society. [...] what I mean is a culture and ways which allows too much freedom. I think [...] our people are not ready to adopt it.”⁶⁶

The interviewee also referred to the model character of Malaysia, when he asked: “What correct things did they do?” and answers that the Malaysian political elite succeeded in maintaining a balance between repression and the freedom of political expression, in

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Interview ,Cotabato City, June 2004.

which everyone without exception was prohibited in interfering with the “internal affairs” of other groups.⁶⁷

Both Moro politicians agreed that the self-determination of the local (i.e. Muslim) people has top priority, but in parallel to this, they spoke for strong political leadership, since, in their opinion, the people are not yet ready for self-government. Another respondent from Cotabato stressed the overwhelming force of the reality of patronage politics in Muslim Mindanao, and also in the rest of the Philippines.

“Democracy is obviously patron-client relationship, where the politician is the patron, like *padrino*, meaning to say, he acts in a paternalistic way to his subjects, the clients. And when he is voted into power he is expected to take care of all these people who have voted for him. [...] Not out of a sense of justice, but out of a sense of kindness to them. And the people expect rewards given to them, not so much in terms of justice again, but ‘Ah, he is a friend of ours. Because we voted for him, therefore he will give us a bridge, he will give us a road.’ [...] So it is not so much a demand of justice, but very often a demand of kindness and charity. And he is willing to do that.”⁶⁸

This pattern is, in his view, spread more widely in the Muslim areas than in those Christian parts of the Philippines, which are comparable with respect to level of development and rural character. He argues that this difference can best be explained by the strongly traditional legitimised power of the *Datu*, which has no real counterpart in Christian areas.

“For the Muslim Filipinos traditional power is truly paternalistic. It is the concept of Community within the Muslim areas, the concept of leadership in that community. [...] The problem of authority and power is compounded. [...] The command vote for elections, wielded by the traditional *datu* is very strong in the Islamic community. It is not surprising if somebody gets zero votes in the community. [...] What the great traditional authority says, that is what the community will do. It doesn’t mean that the community has not expressed its will. Because I think that the community has a sense of the authority as speaking for them. What the authority says is what we say also.”⁶⁹

In his opinion, it is necessary to accept that democracy can be seen and practiced quite differently. He stressed:

“In the last fifty years, democracy has been practiced according to local understanding and local culture, values. In the light of the understanding of the community and their understanding of the leader in the community there is a lot of command votes. And there has been no progress about this for the past fifty years. In fact all political parties have tried their best to recruit local power. When the local power is recruited elections are finished. There has been no protest about this except when the birds and the bees and the dead were voting. Then there was protest. But command votes, when perhaps one or two are voting for the whole community, write down the names, that’s their work, and the whole community says ‘Yes’ to this. Anyway, the leader has spoken and we agree with the leader, ‘so you do the voting yourself, that’s fine.’ No protest about this. So democracy the way we understand it, according to the constitution, is not the democracy that is understood by the people in this communities.”

67 Ibid.

68 Interview, Manila, June 2004.

69 Ibid.

From this can be derived an (admittedly officially untenable) position, which aims at minimising the violence by making the fight for majorities in general elections superfluous:

“a radical renewal of politics in this area would be important. [...]: There should be a new system of elections in the ARMM area, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu, Lanao and Cotabato, Maguindanao. Instead of individual voting let the Datus do the voting. Anyway, they speak for the people. [...] That’s what I say, that’s the new structure that’s necessary. Until such time, when the change of community understanding is changed. And maybe that will change because of education, the rise of enlightened leaders. That might change in the future. So the constitution that governs this ARMM would change also when that level is reached.”⁷⁰

My respondent is, however, far from alone in the region with this radically sounding proposal. The rationale behind the violence-minimising restructuring of the formal democratic system is shared by many other local players.

For example a local leader from the region of Mindanao says: “We don’t like elections. [...] In our past experience, election makes enemies of competing parties and their supporters that often leads to violence.”⁷¹ The awareness of the correlation of electoral democracy and violence occasionally leads on the local level to traditional solutions, which break the formal state law with the approval of all involved. In this way, in some regions, elections are no longer held at the lowest level of administration, the Barangay. In a mixed-religion Barangay the inhabitants agreed to fill the elected positions through a consensual process between the leaders of the various communities.⁷²

Datu Tucao Mastura, a prominent member of the Mastura clan, member of the MNLF in the 1970s and currently mayor of Sultan Kudarat, stresses that this process, in which representatives of the competing elite negotiate the appointment of posts between themselves, is highly beneficial: “This is a good way of preventing our constituents from fighting over the elective positions in their barangay governments. It is only a matter of building consensus among themselves, with the help of the police, the military and their mayors for them to help one another in making the barangay elections a very sensible exercise.”⁷³

In recent times there have also been repeated attempts to develop new institutions along the lines of traditional patterns aiming at civilizing conflict-management and eventual resolution in a non-violent way. In this efforts state rules are not seldom openly ignored by all sides – even murder is negotiated in active cooperation with individual state actors bypassing the official legal system. All players are aware that “some of the traditional methods of conflict resolution may contradict that of the penal code, particularly

70 Ibid.

71 Talin Maulana, quoted according to Jules L. Benitez, Former war zone copes with election violence, in: *Mindanews* 28 April 2004 (www.mindanews.com/2004/04/28nws-exwarzone.html).

72 Benitez, *ibid.*

73 Datu Tucao Mastura, quoted according to John Unson, Rise in Violence in ARMM Feared as Barangay Polls Nearing, in: *Newsflash* 7 July 2002. (www.newsflash.org/2002/07/ht/ht002674.htm).

on matters concerning penalties. [...] the traditional method seeks for settlement of cases mainly through compensation and the 'healing of wounds' while the penal code imposes retributive penalties that include the imprisonment of offenders."⁷⁴ The reason for this process is that attempts to resolve disputes in court often result in more rather than less violence.⁷⁵ The new processes are planned to be introduced into the Regional Legislative Assembly of the ARMM in a legal valid (for the ARMM) form in the near future.

One of my respondents pointed to distinct strength of the clan-based Datu system:

"you are in the here and now, so how do you go about this datu-system now kind of super-imposed into this political system. The datu-mayor, the datu-governor, whether it's based on lineage or based on political power. But the thing is, people would just follow the datu wherever they lead them."⁷⁶

In contrast to many more conservative analysts, he favoured strengthening the position of the NGO, whose representatives

"should get into democratization, facilitating more analyses on the part of the people of what's happening, questioning existing feudal system, looking at whether the present system of direct elections is something that fits into their culture of choosing their own leaders and all that. [...] It can be by consultation, but there are ways of doing it short of direct elections. It can still be democratic."⁷⁷

Although he has a lot of hope for the reforming strength of the NGOs, he is also open to the result on efforts at enhanced participation at the level of power-politics. He stresses that democratisation is

"the real challenge for civil society groups in the ARMM. You know, it's easy to go into livelihood, but it's not easy to go into advocacy for more democratization in the autonomous region, of questioning political elites. We've seen that. ... It's difficult for them to challenge the position of the traditional politicians."⁷⁸

In relation to the normative objective of democratisation, he argues that a democratisation of local relations should not follow the usual western pattern, if this proves to be unusable. He also stresses that a united political unit for all Moros could in practice founder on the ethnic loyalties, such that it would perhaps be better to set up three instead: "One for the Maguindanao, one for the Maranaos and one for the Tausug."⁷⁹ The problem here may, however, lie in the resulting small size of the new institutions which he himself critically objects to.

If many of my respondents have little confidence in the civilising potential of democracy in their country, it comes as little surprise that representatives of the MILF guerrillas

74 Jowel F. Canuday, ARMM execs push for culture-based resolution of conflicts, in: *Mindanews* 2 February 2004 (www.mindanews.com/2004/02/01nws-armm.html).

75 Ibid.

76 Interview, Cotabato City, June 2004.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

also reject the ruling system. The wish is to leave the decision over an appropriate future order to the people (the Moros). Just like in the sense of an *avant-garde*, they still see an enormous need for education and training to ensure that the people are capable of making an informed decision. According to one respondent, it is necessary

“to change the personality of this people. We believe [...] that our people have adopted the system of the present government and sometimes [...] corruption is one way of life. We are trying to change this kind of personality. [...] This is in accordance with the concept and a verse in the Koran. [...] We cannot hope to institute changes within our government before we do that to ourselves.”⁸⁰

As can be expected, the MILF does not rely on the established elite in their hope for change, but critically opposes them:

“Everybody knows these people are up there not because they are still respected by the people, they are loved by the people, but because they’re able to coerce, they are able to use force in maintaining themselves. Everybody knows that in Maguindanao one day before the election they have finished their election. [...] There is no election to speak of. [...] They are able to maintain themselves there by force. [...] They have to give way or change themselves.”⁸¹

Even if the criticism of the existing circumstances were conformed to, the authoritarian attitude, through which a better order would be forced, is, however, clear in this quotation. And the expressed need for education of the people makes it clear that the respondent assumes that a rejection of the MILF vision is in fact inconceivable.

Whatever your position on the various proposals, everyone appears to agree that the modern Western democratic system, as has been introduced in the Philippines following American colonial rule, is at least not suitable for the region of the ARMM and must be heavily modified. All proposals aim at a stronger acceptance and revival of traditional structures and principles of order.

Whether these proposals have any chance at civilising the conflict, or, reversely, run an increased risk of reinforcing aspects of a coercive identity, will finally be illustrated in the following.⁸²

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Coercive identities are characterised by a more or less extensive practice of identity-based social closure and subordination with respect to group members. They grow from cultural systems which can develop a high degree of cruelty internally, whereby they enforce compliance with the norms with violent means. The norms themselves in turn legitimise the use of violence and force for their own enforcement (see: Emanuel de Kadt, *Curbing coercive identities*, United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report Office, Occasional Paper, No. 3, 2004; Jacob T. Levy, *The Multiculturalism of Fear*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2000, especially pp. 51-62).

4.2 Chances and limits of targeted intervention

Clan violence and “normal” “everyday” political violence were already characteristic structural elements of the local political order before the Muslim rebellion. The new arena of violence, the civil war, and its players could be used as an additional resource by the clans in the fight for political and economic power, although, at the same time, they appeared to threaten the local dominance of the various clans. Seen in this way, the civil war represents an enabling structure which allowed opportunistic actors to use its frame and potential of legitimate violence to satisfy their own interests. Good contacts with the guerrillas or the military and the authority to use the services of the large numbers of CAFGUs or police units serve as an additional resource for the promotion of the interests of the clans. This not only escalates clan violence, but also leads to its masking behind the façade of the violence between the guerrillas and military.

Any strategy which aims at solving the political conflict between the MILF guerrillas and the Philippine state, must be aware of these dynamics and develop an integrated “recipe” for civilising, if not overcoming, the violent political competition of the powerful Muslim (and Christian) political dynasties.

In the search for possible solutions a traditional underpinning of state authorities, as promoted by many local reform-oriented players, should be considered – also because certain democratic structural elements lead to extremely counterproductive results in the interaction with established social practices. However, in advocating selective “re-traditionalisation” it should not be underestimated that the traditional order also has a high degree of internal dynamics of violence.

In this sense, it seems imperative to consider a partial “retraditionalisation” bound to certain conditions of the Philippine Muslim south. Overcoming the clan system is not possible in the foreseeable future and, in my opinion, also not desirable per se, so long as it appears to be an adequate social order to the local population. What is possible, however, is a selective reform of this order, aimed at strengthening the culturally intrinsic, conflict-minimising and civilising dimensions. If consensual practices of determining local leadership posts are acceptable locally and have a civilising effect, then their conditioned legalising makes sense. If mediation and blood money are successful as effective mechanisms of resolving feuds, then it is worth legalising these informal mechanisms and supporting them to the best of our ability. The common norms established here can lead, in the medium term, to civilising conflict management and resolution more extensively. A very positive development in recent times is that guerrillas and state players increasingly refer to clan violence as such and have, thereby, repeatedly avoided a sudden change to politically highly loaded frames of reference.

This emphasis on reforming the local social order, however, should not be misunderstood as downplaying the political conflict between the Muslims and the Philippine state – this conflict can not be treated as an appendix. Committed action is equally imperative here. Unfortunately, time and again structured and committed conflict-resolution efforts have either been absent, or cut-short by counter-productive action in the violence arena.

If the current talks mediated by Malaysia will find a way out of the quagmire of competing claims and seemingly incompatible political aims remains to be seen.

Last but not least it is worth pointing out that many of the patterns described here in reference to Muslim-Mindanao can also be found in various forms in many other regions of the Philippines. Many fundamental characteristics of the local order – familialism and political penetration of the local bureaucracies – are characteristic right up to the national political level. The democratic practice of the Philippines is characterised by two legacies of the American colonial time, which in interaction with the analysed cultural patterns have an exacerbating effect on violence.

The sequence of events itself with which democratic rule in the Philippines was established promoted the deformation of some of its basic principles of function. Under the aegis of the American colonial power, democratic rule was gradually built upwards from below. This enabled the local elite to bring these modern institutions of political rule under their control step by step, level by level. Representatives of the powerful, local big landowners became mayors at the local level, and then later governors, members of congress and senators. Entrenched feudal relations were gradually hidden behind the cloak of democratic rule, without this ever being questioned – to this day, land reform is one of the hottest political potatoes in the Philippines but, despite adequate legislation often against the resistance of the landowning classes (i.e. families/clans), is making partial headway at best. As a result, an order now exists in which a relatively small number of powerful families determines policy at the national and local level.⁸³ The dynamics growing out of the familialistic system, which lead to violence, are similar in many of the regions in the Philippines. The Muslim south stands out because additional, violence-shaping, form-giving resources derived from in the civil war and the counter-identity of the Muslims/Moros can be used, which are not available in this form anywhere else in the Philippines.

This development would have been clearly less problematic for Philippine democracy if the Americans had not left behind a further democratic legacy: Extensive politisation of the Philippine state apparatus, which, in this respect, follows the American model to a large extent. A neutral administration, better isolated in its actions from the political will of local and also national politicians would have been able to function as an “antithesis” to the oligarchic politics. The fact is, however, that so far there are scarcely any starting points for this. Local administrations often act as the extended arms of local politicians and not as neutral authorities, which could restrict political demands for power through their regulated action.

83 See, e.g.: Sheila S. Coronel et.al. (ed.), *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and Well-Born Dominate Congress*, Quezon City (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism) 2004. The attached diskette contains the most extensive collection of data on the personal relations of all congress members and senators in the last period of office. Most of these and other information can also be had on the Information Site on Philippine Politics and Government (www.i-site.ph/index.html). See also the modern literature classic on the powerful families in the Philippines Alfred W. McCoy (ed.), *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, Manila (Ateneo de Manila University Press) 1994.

The fact that oligarchic rule could be stabilised, is also due to the democratic organisation of the political system. In a country dominated by oligarchic big landowners, the land has been divided into electoral districts, in which the strongest candidate in each one is appointed to the house of representatives as a representative. This led to the fragmentation of power along the borders of the territories controlled by the families. Transforming the electoral system into a proportional system, which would undermine local dominance in favour of a broad, national platform, could build the basis for a fundamental reorganisation of the system as a whole. The same question, which can be raised in connection with the problem of preventing political dynasties, can also be raised here, i.e. why would the elite, who stand to lose the most and whose representatives dominate the legislative and the executive, decide to deprive themselves of power.

With reference to the continued political and economic dominance of a small ruling, familialistically organised class, the Philippines finds itself *de facto* in a vicious circle, since all starting points for reform appear to be blocked. The omnipresent, extolled, lively, extremely critical and open Philippine civil society offers only very long-term perspectives of social change. The problem is that civil society has been carrying out its progressive work with verve and great success for years with only the smallest of results within the system. The fact that the system is based on politics legitimised democratically through elections could possibly make change more difficult than it would be in the case of an autocracy. Whereas autocracies tend to suppress protest and opposition, which firstly, in many cases, robs the regime of its remaining legitimacy, and secondly, increasingly narrows and also isolates it, an “open society” like that of the Philippines fully promotes critical discourse. Nevertheless, the system has proved itself capable of toning down its system-critical dynamics, by transferring them into the system on the rhetorical level and allowing them to peter out through constant political debate, on the one hand, and discussion of political reform, on the other. This way the established elite gains time and is able to restructure their own organisation such that they also remain dominant in a reformed system. Partially induced through the civil society the ruling elite proves able to “automodernise” constantly and thereby hold fast to the reins of power. So civil society mobilisation and elite automodernisation result in a gradual change of many of the political practices, but not in a further democratisation of the political system. Violence remains an important resource in the fight for political power especially at the local level – and this is no different for Muslim-Mindanao than for many other regions of the Philippines.

Glossary

ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BDA	Bangsamoro Development Agency
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
CAFGU	Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit
CVO	Civilian Volunteers Organization
ICHDF	Integrated Civilian Home Defense Unit
LEAP	Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NPA	New People's Army
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
RLA	Regional Legislative Assembly (legislative of the ARMM)
RPM-M	Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa sa Mindanao
SPCPD	Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development
SPDA	Southern Philippines Development Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development