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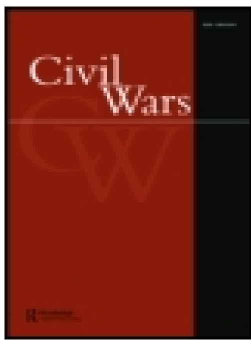

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Identity, Ideology and Child Soldiering: Community and Youth Participation in Civil Conflict – A Study on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao, Philippines

ALPASLAN ÖZERDEM, SUKANYA PODDER AND EDDIE L. QUITORIANO

The cessation of the governmental offensive to eliminate key figures of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2009 imparted fresh impetus to the peace process in Mindanao, Philippines. Recent clashes have resulted in large-scale and ongoing displacement. This stalemate, together with the end of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's Presidential term, has revived concerns about the future dynamics of the Bangsamoro struggle. An important dimension in this is the 'voluntary' nature of the participation of children and young people in the ranks of the MILF, sanctioned and often encouraged by their families and community. This presents an interesting contrast to the predominant literature on child soldiering that seems overly aligned with the coercive recruitment and related trauma-healing axis. In this article we examine the role of identity, ideology, the family and community in this presumed voluntary participation of children and youth in the MILF, in order to refine the linkage between recruitment experience of children and youth and their reintegration outcomes, and prescribe more appropriate reintegration interventions for youth in scenarios of participation sanctioned by family and community.

> Family affiliation made participation a natural progression ... with martyrdom in the name of the cause the ultimate achievement or feat ...
>
> (15-year-old MILF combatant, Iligan City, Mindanao, Philippines)

In recent years many academic studies have attempted to relate two sides of the micro-foundations of civil war spectrum: the mode of recruitment of former combatants and their experiences within armed groups to the nature of their reintegration outcomes.[1] In the context of child soldiers, most studies conclude that much child recruitment is coercive, and is motivated by a range of potential benefits derived from recruiting children.[2] Thus the literature seems aligned with the coercive recruitment axis from which the need to cater to psycho-social healing in post-conflict reintegration interventions derive. It fails to identify implications for child

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soldier reintegration in a situation where joining an armed group is a natural progression in social existence, is community mediated and ideologically sanctioned, unproblematised by issues of community rejection, problems which are often critical in cases of abduction or coercive recruitment.

The two competing approaches to children in armed conflict within international relations and security studies literature are poised round the humanitarian and cultural relativist accounts of childhood. Undermining culturally specified notions of adulthood, '18 years' is often taken as the internationally accepted benchmark around which demarcation between children and adults has come to be consecrated in the language of law, and accepted as a global norm. Deriving from orthodox developmental models of childhood presented by Piaget and his intellectual progeny, this humanitarian account views the transition from childhood to adulthood as universal, and naturally determined, and believes that children are intrinsically immature, incompetent, and irrational. As children grow older, nature – mediated by enculturation and socialisation – transforms the child into a competent, mature, and rational adult. This in turn has spawned universalisation of a predominantly Western conception of childhood which privileges innocence, vulnerability and decision-making incapacity of children. Informed by an historically nuanced nationalist perspective, the cultural relativist school on the other hand argues, that while children's immaturity remains an undeniable biological fact, conceptualisation of this immaturity along with the meanings attached to it is essentially a fact of culture.[3] Hence the notion of childhood as a universal institution is widely challenged here.

Given this broad conceptual canvas, a relatively expansive definition of children (or minors) associated with fighting forces (CAFF) has come to be adopted by the international community in order to avoid narrowing the field prematurely, and relegating ancillary participation to anonymity. The Cape Town principles define a child soldier as:

> [A]ny person under eighteen years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. Girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage are included in this definition. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.

In this view, 'child soldier is a highly diverse category, and the term implies neither that the child was a combatant nor that the child participated willingly in wrongdoing'.[4] In this paper we adhere to this expansive definition.

The incipient literature on youth participation in civil conflict looks at various aspects of the recruitment-reintegration spectrum. Country specific literature seeks to identify causal variables in terms of recruitment and enlistment motivations, the results of reintegration programming over longitudinal time spans, and explorations into the psycho-social and community dimensions of reintegration processes.[5] It is our proposition that the recruitment experience and reintegration-outcome linkage

can help explore ways in which variance in the mode of recruitment, experience of being a combatant – namely, time spent in the rebel group – can have important implications for reintegration outcomes. Therefore, in this article, we seek to highlight an overlooked dimension of recruitment and participation in armed groups, namely that of the community. The linkages between identity markers and ideologies which shape a particular community's idea of self can be potent sources of motivation for voluntary enrolment in rebel groups. It seems that agency dynamics (role of community or the individual) and the empowerment argument remains a critical yet understudied element in youth participation in conflict, with important results for reintegration outcomes. Given that role of the community in recruitment into armed groups in Mindanao is largely facilitative it raises a few contentious issues about possible future reintegration strategies for children associated with the group and merits an informed debate about what 'reintegration' would possibly mean in such a context.

METHODOLOGY

Three major insurgent groups have waged armed struggle against the forces of the Philippine military since the 1960s. These are the Communist-oriented New People's Army (NPA), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its breakaway faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The latter two groups were organised by Muslim revolutionary leaders, convinced that armed struggle was/is the only way to express the right to self-determination for the Bangsamoro Muslims in Mindanao. Late in the 1980s, a group of ragtag armed youth, mostly from the Yakan and Sama ethnic groups based on the island province of Basilan emerged to become the country's foremost bandit and kidnap-for-ransom group. The group, known as the Abu Sayyaf ('Bearer of the Sword') has lately been reported to have recruited several minors into their fold.

Our research focus was on recruitment and participation into the MILF in the Lanao provinces of Mindanao from among the Maranao tribe, and the role of identity, ideology and community in this decision. The field study conducted over three weeks involved a total of 40 interviews with Maranao families and communities, civil society groups, government officials in Manila and Iligan City (north coast of Mindanao), and some 20 in-depth interviews with child soldiers and former child soldiers affiliated with the MILF for oral histories. In terms of respondent averages, Table 1 below provides an overview of the interviewees.

Two focus-group discussions with families and community groups at Kauswagan village incorporated group-level insights. Interviews were conducted in Tagalog through interpreters and notes were transcribed and later translated because there are 85 languages and dialects – the most dominant are Tagalog, Cebuano or Visayan and its related variants, Hiligaynon – also known as Ilonggo – Bicolano, Waray, Pampango, Batangueno, Ifugao, and Kalinga among others. Permission for recording interviews was granted in most cases, except with the child soldiers. Several ethical concerns were central to the conduct of this research,

TABLE 1
RESPONDENT AVERAGES

Gender	Male	Female
	15	5
Age Average	15	18
Years Spent in MILF	3	2
Desire to Leave/Never to Return	7	3
Role in MILF		
Non-Combatant (Communications/Espionage/Camp Orderly)	13	5
Combatant (Combat Support/Frontline Combat)	2	–
Civilian Supporter	–	–

in particular the issue of access in an ethical and safe manner. This hurdle was negotiated with the help of our local non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners Kapamagogopa Inc. (KI) and Pailig Development Foundation Inc. in Iligan City which were implementing assistance for displaced and conflict affected people in the aftermath of a fresh government offensive against leading MILF commanders in August–September 2008. These organisations had well established links with former child soldiers who grew up in MILF camps or in communities close to them, and who at that juncture were displaced following the fall of Camp Poona Paigapo.

To ensure accountability and honesty, we debriefed informants about the academic nature of the research and chose to rely on small tokens of appreciation like pens, key chains, and a box of assorted food items, to make participants feel rewarded for their participation. We used a semi-structured questionnaire which focused on the nature of voluntary participation in the MILF, by probing issues like (a) the internal value of recruiting children for the armed groups (e.g., communications, combat support, espionage, camp orderlies); (b) incentives offered to children and youth for voluntary participation; (c) influence of culture (e.g., the politico-religious invocation of the MILF and the religious-cultural tradition of communities); (d) impact of structural variables such as displacement, poverty, unemployment, and a lack of educational opportunities; and (e) nature of community mediation, its role as facilitator by creating social pressure for youth to be part of a cause rooted in community ideals and beliefs.

The research process was also interwoven with certain challenges and limitations which need to be discussed at the outset and will help illustrate and share our findings better. The fieldwork was plagued by issues of security risk and limited physical access to some of the Lanao del Sur Province areas where we initially planned to visit. This also affected our findings in terms of offering greater nuance about command and control, hierarchy within the MILF and also issues of punishment/persecution and retribution to enforce group discipline. Given that access to our limited sample was negotiated through intermediaries – local NGOs – this strategy of sampling in a situation of widespread displacement and fear also involved inherent biases.

Triangulation of findings was attempted by interacting with different groups of actors and stakeholders to address these issues; however the results are far from

complete. Hence the paper analyses preliminary themes in the youth-community interaction in Mindanao. Larger issues of comparison with other contexts, such as Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Colombia and Sri Lanka are outside the scope of this paper and have been discussed elsewhere; we focus on a specific problem and assume that readers will refer to the broader literature on youth in armed conflict for contextual comparison.[6]

IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, IDEOLOGY AND CONFLICT IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

The contextual basis for this study entails a detailed inquiry into the moorings of separatist resistance among the Muslims in Mindanao. The 'Bangsamoro people' comprise historically of 13 Islamised ethno-linguistic groups.[7] In terms of demographic distribution the Muslims in Mindanao are concentrated in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces.[8] The non-Muslim indigenous tribes are collectively called the 'Lumads' and comprise of more than 20 ethno-linguistic groups.[9] Islam traces a long lineage in the region. Introduced by Muslim traders in the late 14th century, it imparted structure and unity among the diverse ethno-linguistic groups of western Mindanao, and enabled the establishment of control over non-Muslim inhabitants. Islam also created a dialectical opposition to Western influences with the advent of Spanish and American influence in the archipelago. Subsequent demographic shifts created by the advent of Christian settlers, resulted in distinct fault-lines between these entities namely the Christians, the Muslims, and Lumads or indigenous tribes and created distinct hurdles in the creation of an integrated Philippine nation.[10]

According to one estimate in 1903, Muslims comprised 76 per cent of the population in the islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan, but by 1990, this had gone down to 19 per cent, conversely, the non-Muslim population grew from 24 per cent to 81 per cent during the same period.[11] At present, the Muslims are a minority population estimated to be four to seven million strong.[12] These demographic changes were accompanied by other shifts under the colonial policies of Spain and the United States. Under Spanish rule, the 'Regalian doctrine' did away with the Moro tradition of communal land ownership, mostly in the control of clan chiefs, or datus, who were responsible for distribution of land under their jurisdiction. Communal access to water, forests, land and other natural resources which were free and equal prior to the doctrine, came to be regulated thereafter. Significantly the sultanates were undermined and rights of Moros and other indigenous peoples in terms of traditional land- holdings occupancy were invalidated.[13]

Apart from this dispossession, resettlement policies and attempts at acculturation and assimilation by the Christian Filipino majority only triggered revivalist responses among the Muslim tribes which transformed over time from the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).[14] Over time, Muslim resistance has splintered with some groups demanding autonomy and others calling for independence. For example, the MNLF abandoned their call

for independence in favour of autonomy, and more radical members broke off to create the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which continues to demand independence.

The only groups that could be classified as jihadist, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Raja Solaiman Movement (RSM), were offshoots of these separatist groups. Many Muslims view the Philippine conflict as a legitimate jihad, but inside the country jihad largely serves to create a common Moro-Muslim identity. The main proponents of violence in the Philippines, the MNLF and the MILF, have linked with supporters from the Middle East at different times, but any discussion of jihad is primarily used as a mobilising tool for the local ethnic campaign. However, ASG and the offshoot RSM deviate from this pattern.[15]

Peace negotiations and a policy of accommodation on part of the central government over the years resulted in a progressive dilution of the MNLF's stand and culminated in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement which created the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) composed of 13 provinces as a democratic palliative for Muslim aspirations. Later the Jakarta Peace Agreement of 1996 launched a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process for the integration of the MNLF cadre into the mainstream of the Philippine polity and civilian life was expected to bring about a marked de-escalation in tensions.[16]

This agreement however gave impetus to a renewal of separatist aims of the Muslims under the banner of a rival Maguindanao-based group – the MILF, for which socio-economic inequalities faced by Mindanao have played a significant role. According to the 2006 official poverty statistics more than half households in the ARMM are classified as poor and poverty in the region reached 55.3 per cent in 2006, a 9.9 per cent increase from 2003's 45.4 per cent.[17] Further, the post- independence Philippine state is best described as premature and weak, devoid of a cohesive national consciousness and relative autonomy from the parochial interests of dominant Filipino social classes and powerful elites.[18] Hence the state failings in the arena of democratic, egalitarian social service delivery and governance seem intrinsically related to the political economy of conflict in Mindanao.

While there is a vast literature covering the Islamist dimension and moorings of the separatist conflict in Mindanao there is relatively sparse academic literature on the MILF's organisational and logistical capacities.[19] The group has an estimated strength of 8,000 to 11,000 men, and is structurally organized into six divisions of its military wing; the Bangsamoro Islamic Army (BIAF).[20] It has remained a formidable outfit, partly on account of external funding and support from countries like Malaysia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan among others.[21] Despite its more explicit, avowed espousal of Islamic tenets, as an organisation the MILF presents a pragmatic and adaptive entity.[22] Under the initial leadership of Hashim Salamat, the MILF has made ideology, and identity issues flexible; tailoring both territorial and group objectives to meet exigency and advocating incorporation of the non-Muslim indigenous Lumad population as part of its Bangsamoro homeland ideal. These traits have resulted in cooperative endeavour with the Armed Forces of the Philippines in a bid

to dissociate itself from 'terrorist' organisations like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Abu Sayyaf group (ASG) in the post-9/11 global environment.[23]

While there has been much discussion on the role of ideology and religion in providing content to the Bangsamoro struggle, the workings and significance of Islam in the life of communities in Mindanao permeates into their educational discourses and also offers socio-cultural markers of difference amid a common overarching belief system. Like all Muslims in the Philippines, the Maranao concentrated in the Lanao provinces follow a different set of laws than their Christian neighbours. This law had been established in 1977 and is called the Code of Muslim Personal Law of the Philippines. It deals with inheritance and family rights of Muslim people according to the Quran and is implemented through shariah courts in Mindanao.

Education in particular has been at the centre of a struggle between trends in secularisation by the Christian majority government and Islamisation by local ulemas (groups of Muslim scholars) and educators in Mindanao.[24] While in the past, most Maguindanaon and Iranun parents feared to send their children to public school in order to minimise the risk of them losing the purity of 'being Muslim'. This attitude is based on the perception that the Western educational system implemented in the Philippine public school system will orient them to Western, 'Christian' ways. The educational system of the Muslims in the country comprises several options. There are public schools, private religious schools that are mainly Christian and *madaris* which used to focus only on religious knowledge. However, recently not only have the *madaris* changed their programme to adapt to the needs of the Muslims, but also the public schools in the ARMM started to integrate Islamic and Arabic studies into their programmes.[25]

On the issue of identity, recent explorations into the role of religion in identity conflicts suggests that 'religion is often more comprehensive and potent in strengthening the requisites of distinct group or individual identity compared to other repositories of cultural meaning in the construction and maintenance of individual and group identities'. This has been strongly the case in Mindanao.[26] To grasp the intricacies of community among the Muslims in Mindanao, a linguistic approach into their spatial and social organisational dynamics offers interesting insights. The 'community' in the simplest connotation is called the '*kawalayaan*' that is, a group of houses. This definition is devoid of kinship genealogies, and is based on physical proximity issues.[27] Among the Maranaos, kin related ties refer to '*inged*', '*suku*' and '*pongampong*' which in turn define size and spread of the clan.[28]

'Community' in this context is also often replicated in 'camps' and this is a seemingly unique phenomenon in Mindanao. The issue of MILF camps has always been a matter of contention, given that these have become the basis for territorial claims in Mindanao and constitute pockets of autonomous areas outside government control and are self-sustainable communities in themselves. During the Ramos administration the MILF were permitted to retain control over their camps as a measure towards mutual confidence building. When a shift in policy was evident under the Estrada administration, many of these camps[29] were overrun over in

2000, including Camp Abu Bakr, which was the main camp extending up to 5,000 hectares, with many villages and communities displaced.[30]

Moreover, studies on the Maranao suggest that the family is the basis of culture with reliance on the clan instead of the state for basic needs. Financial support by elders in the kin structure is common practice, especially with educational support for younger siblings.[31] Family is also crucial in personal decision-making, premised on two principles concepts for the Maranao, namely *marabat* (honour) and *rido* (blood feud). In Mindanao, inter-group conflict as well as the conflict between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF and other groups like the NPA and Abu Sayyaf is reinforced by intra-tribal *rido* which draw on such traditional concepts as *marabat*, which also define relations between the various Islamic and non-Islamic tribes. These clan feuds tend to perpetuate a cycle of vengeance and retaliation with frequent civilian killings, political rivalry, land disputes and crimes like theft, non-payments of debts, elopement.[32] This source of conflict perpetuation and escalation is disruptive for civilians since with the initiation of a *rido* conflict, the members of the kin group or the community are often immobilised, on account of them being potential targets for retaliation.[33] Every year *rido* conflicts in Lanao are on the rise, and today activists in the Maranao community are increasingly concerned since these are considered to be contrary to the teachings of Islam.[34]

Finally, as far as the involvement of youth in the conflict is concerned, an accurate picture on the number of child soldiers in the Philippines is difficult to obtain because of the invisible nature of the problem. Most data is drawn from regional statistics on child soldiers who have self-demobilised, escaped or been arrested by the AFP, and turned over into the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Nevertheless the numbers are unreliable and differ between DSWD and AFP records on surrenderees from groups like the MILF and the New People's Army (NPA). The other source of estimates is field studies undertaken in different sectors like non-governmental, military, media and by academe.[35] The best working estimate with some revisions applicable is the International Labour Office (ILO)/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) study which calculated that there may be a child population of 1,000 to 1,500 in rebel group areas and surrounding communities with between 100 and 450 of them are as children associated or engaged in combat as part of these groups. In the Philippines, a unique dimension in the phenomenon of CIAC (Children Involved in Armed Combat) is the seeming absence of forced recruiting in their membership of various armed groups which was voiced by cadres, former cadres, and civil society activists alike.[36]

The latest report on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) lists the MILF, NPA, and the government Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAGFU) as violators of the child soldier norm. Of these the MILF has agreed with the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, to enter into an action plan, to ensure the separation of children in their ranks and their return to civilian life in 2009.[37] During her visit to the MILF Camp Ghazali Jafar, vice chairman for Political Affairs of the MILF Central Committee insisted that children with the MLF were not recruited and used for combat; they simply took care of orphaned children,

while children of MILF commanders living inside the camps with their families were given military training for their initiation into adulthood.[38] But for our purposes it was interesting to explore life within these camps and relate it to our broader investigation of recruitment experience and reintegration outcomes.

FROM MILF RECRUITMENT TO 'REINTEGRATION'

The majority of our respondents and informants testified that immersion into the world of armed conflict as MILF cadres and combatants seems to be product of a fluid process which incorporates community mediation, family support and ease of release. In terms of our points of inquiry, among our sample of 20 child soldiers, 18 were engaged in non-combatant roles like espionage, camp orderly and communications, food delivery etc., only two had experienced frontline combat and risen to the rank of commanders in their group. With regard to incentives offered to children and youth for voluntary participation and the influence of culture – religion, political ideology and issues of Islamic identity, especially duty to Allah were all advanced as a strong motivational variable in all of our respondents. In terms of family, community mediation role while five of the young boys demonstrated individual enthusiasm and will, the rest (15) were in some way supported, encouraged by their family or members of the community where they lived. In terms of structural influences, proximity to MILF camps, low educational attainment, poverty, displacement and economic uncertainty, or unemployment were important compulsions for almost every respondent. The life of these child soldiers, revealed continuity, in terms of persistent contact with family during their stay at MILF camps, which was unique. At the point of release, lack of formal reintegration efforts limits projections about future reintegration trajectories. In our interviews, we could gather several self-demobilisation experiences which presented unfulfilled life aspirations and reliance on the family for establishing new livelihoods, with little expectation for support from the government.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AS AGENTS

In grasping the role of family and community as agents, proximity to MILF camps created general community conditions making it easy and viable for children to join armed groups. Interviews with the village schoolmaster and several of the village elders at Kauswagan[39] validated the support which families and communities in areas near MILF camps offer to the group.[40] This support also points towards the conciliatory and unproblematic relationship between the MILF and these ancillary communities, which are often extended families; kith and kin of current or past MILF members. Hence the element of coercion which dominates much literature on child recruitment together with the notoriety of child soldier combat behaviour as reflected in African cases was missing in this context.

All of the interviews with child soldiers indicated that they had joined MILF voluntarily, either egged on by their parents, or as part of duty to Allah. Economic

motivations were practically non-existent although they have been reported in case of groups like the CAFGU.[41] Exposure to the activities of the MILF through parents or relatives who are part of the group shapes the choices, ideas and conviction of youth. It also creates continuity in life choice across generations. This was echoed in the voices of our respondents:

> My father is my inspiration. He was an MILF fighter. My own parents are keen on seeing me grow into a brave man. (15-year-old)

> I was not pressured by my parents to join the MILF. It was my own decision. I fancied being with an armed group, holding a gun and looking brave and strong. (14-year-old)

> I joined the MILF when I was 12 years old. My two older brothers joined the group ahead of me. Except for my father, all my uncles are also fighters of the MILF. Joining the group has been my wish. It is a sacrifice and the ultimate fulfilment of my desire to serve the struggle. (17-year-old)

> I joined the MILF when I was 15. Before then, I already served the MILF as food courier and caretaker of their horses. I joined the group due to my belief in Allah and to express myself as someone who can decide on his own. (23-year-old)

> There are five of us siblings. I am the eldest. I got as far as first year high school. That was it. My parents could not afford to send me to school anymore. I joined the MILF in 2005 when I was 10 years old. My father himself persuaded me to join the group. I was also eager to join for economic reasons. During my stay with the MILF my family had one less mouth to feed. (15-year-old)

Evidently the concept of childhood in Muslim society is culture specific and unrelated to the 18-year norm entrenched in international legal protections. Indigenous tribes too have their own home grown concepts of community defense where military training and arms become a way of socialisation into adulthood. Overall, the child soldiers interviewed in this study strongly identify with the Bangsamoro cause, and their parents do not hesitate to allow or even encourage the participation of their youth. At the same time this was not a universal truth, some of the relatively better-off families did appear to favour peaceful alternatives for their children, opting to send them to schools and colleges in more peaceful pockets like Iligan City where the Mindanao State University is based. Hence family and community we found were major factors in facilitating participation.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that it was difficult to make a sharp distinction between life with MILF and the home life of the children, as they seemed to move seamlessly between the two contexts, and there was evident overlap, with recruitment in some cases supported, encouraged by the family. Hence the distinctness of this case is reinforced compared to West Africa, where children unless they successfully ran away from the armed group, often they would lose

contact with family and return processes were difficult especially if they had engaged in or were coerced into committing atrocities near their home communities.

LIFE AS CHILD SOLDIERS

Here we present excerpts from our respondents' life histories to capture variation and reflect on family background, processes of initiation, and experience within the MILF – training, exposure to violence, living conditions, and roles which are unique to the Mindanao case. All respondent names have been changed in the life stories to ensure anonymity:

> Sohail who is now 23 years old hails from Pangao, Munai (Lanao del Norte). He is son of a *jeepney* [public vehicle] driver and youngest among his three siblings, He barely finished elementary school before joining the MILF, where he served as a commander prior to his demobilisation. He explained that during his attachment to the MILF he was in regular touch with his family and '… visited home at least once a week …'
>
> Akbar joined the MILF in 2007 at the age of 14 years. He was lured by appeals of Commander 'Dragon' asking for fresh recruits and help from Akbar's village, also the Commander's hometown. His role involved carrying food and parcels of heavy weight to the camp some two hours from his village. This task was allocated to him thrice in the week together with some odd jobs like cleaning the camp. Although he was give some military drills he did not learn the use of weapons and was a non-combatant per se. He also recounted exposure to lessons from the Quran and basic Arabic. At the camp he had little say in decision-making and lived in a group of 55 persons, with 20 odd children or young people. He visited his family often and spent four days in the week with them. He had a high regard for Commander 'Dragon', who 'was always nice to the children at the camp …'

Roshan was bored of agriculture and farming, the mainstay for his family. He felt by joining, he could learn new things at the MILF camp. He liked life in the camp, he attended Quran classes, made many friends there and spent time with them as a group. His work there involved 'carrying food, water, cooking, and collecting firewood.' He recollects playing basketball at the camp, and handling weapons with his cousins. Although he did not receive military training, or take part in combat, he is aware of many other young people who have. He admitted to visiting his family often while at the camp, and to us seemed a normal child with no evidence of any trauma or psycho-social problems.

For Rehman, a 15-year-old from Lanao del Norte, daily life in the camp comprised of adults going on patrol, while the youth were left in the camp on guard duty, with a older, 17-year-old boy supervising them. There was gender-based segregation of tasks and living quarters, girls were mainly engaged in cooking and washing of dishes, while boys were involved in gathering firewood, water and

serving food to the officers. He kept guard duty at the camp for three days each week, collected firewood, and served food to officers and helped clean the camp. He experienced fighting only once in October 2006, when the camp was attacked by an AFP unit. During this two hour skirmish, he 'trembled in fear especially on witnessing the death of two fighters'.

On the other hand, Abdul who studied till the third grade was forced to drop out in the face of economic hardship and found his way into the MILF. The group that he was part was supervised by Ibrahim, a 22-year-old trainee, armed with a calibre .45 pistol. Abdul was trained in weapons handling, and engaged in physical exercises like swimming, marching, mountain climbing and obstacle courses. Indoctrinated in Islamic preaching, he attended daily Quran prayers, and stood camp guard duty when adult fighters went on patrol apart from gathering firewood, fetching water, and serving food to officers. He seemed unaware of the nuances of military structure except the ranks of Commander 'Bravo' and Commander 'Dragon'. Anecdotally he suggested that 'around 500 children in his village of Poona Piagapo and 500 more from Piagapo are involved or members of the MILF'.

Karim had several cousins and blood relatives in the camp, most of them were teenagers about 16–17 years old. Given this friendly environment, he spent only four days in the week at the camp, and engaged in farming at home in his free time. An important insight he shared was the process of selecting child soldiers to take part in mobile fighting units, namely those sent to engage in skirmishes with the AFP forces. This selection was made by the Camp Commander and on the physical capabilities of the child. Karim attended three months of training, at the MILF camp near Poona Paigapo and was trained in handling weapons, obstacle training, and live firing. Some of the youngest members in his group were only 11–13 years and mostly engaged in reserve tasks like fetching water or food delivery. Discipline he recalled was strictly enforced and 'disobedience or refusal to follow the commander's or supervisor's instructions meant beatings and brief immersions in the fish pond'.

Ayesha, one of our female child soldiers represents the classic lure of the gun case. She was excited by the prospect of handling weapons and felt romantically attracted to some of the members at the camp near her village. She recounts that 'there were around 500 young people in the 102nd Base Camp near Munai with 400 boys and some 100 girls ... most of the children came from poor families in the neighbourhood, and were related by blood or kinship ties'. She was trained as a reserve, and was involved in support duties like cooking and cleaning. One of the issues apparent from her account was the respect given to girls and women, since Ayesha insisted that there 'is no sexual exploitation or abuse of girls in the MILF'. This statement was not a one-off testimony to the lack of sexual abuse in the MILF ranks, interviews with other girls, women who had relatives in the group and with field workers from Kapamagogopa Inc. (KI) and Pailig Development Foundation also corroborated this as true. On the whole she and her friends were supporters of the MILF and felt secure due to the presence of relatives and cousins at the camp. Her own brother joined the camp later. This suggests that her family share her belief in the cause underlying the rebel group.

Overall, for the key informants, particularly those who have extensive knowledge of the situation in the MILF camps, they claim that while children are in the camps, they receive instruction in Arabic and in the Quran. They are taught the basic precepts of Islam, especially in reciting Quranic verses and in reciting prayers properly. Thus, for some of them, this is not really seen as work in the traditional sense. Even if the children spend long hours in the camps for their military and other type of training, the parents of these children feel confident and 'happy' that their children are in 'good' hands, and that they will become self-disciplined and free from the influence of Western excesses like drug or alcohol addiction, gambling and free sex.

DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION

Demobilisation is a family and self-induced process which does not appear to complicate relations with the rebel group. Most children and youth are unaware of reintegration support from the government agencies or unable to access the same. Hence return to family and community, namely, sites which engendered their participation in the first place does not appear to be a very effective mechanism for peace consolidation.

As a friend of the Mayor of Iligan City one of the informants appeared to be better placed than the others and reported that: 'I recently ran for elections to the Kagawad village council ... as a member I earn PHP [Philippine pesos] 800 per month.' However at the time of our interview he was displaced in an evacuation centre in Dilabayan, Kauswagan. Another of our younger respondents stated that: 'I left the MILF in 2008 during the evacuation of Poona Piagapo. My parents' secured my release by requesting Commander "Dragon". I don't want to go back.' This boy seemed afraid about his future choices. He revealed that his brother Muay also does not want to go back to the MILF, at present he has evacuated with his family to Hinaplanon, Iligan City. On the other hand, protocols on severing ties with the group exist as well, and if followed allow for a peaceful transition. Although not every informant related such ease, one of them stated: 'I was dismissed from the MILF and still fear for my personal safety.'

We feel there are some discrepancies in this account and he was not willing to elaborate. He was very uncomfortable during the interview and it took him a long time and great deal of assurance from the interviewer, since he seemed to have little confidence and trust in the confidentiality of the interview. He seemed clearly to be experiencing high levels of stress. His present income of 300 pesos per day was sufficient for now, yet to settle down with a family he felt the need for more money and was keen on ways to augment his income. He received no reintegration benefits or assistance in restarting his civilian life. It seemed clear that he did not miss his MILF days, and in his view, there are many others who would like to leave and start afresh, but his only abiding fear remains that the MILF might call him back to duty.

Some admitted to being dependent on the decision of their father and the MILF commanders to allow them to demobilise. One expressed desire to go and settle

in the Visayas, and leave Mindanao, and seemed enchanted by stories of other combatants who appear to be have made a fresh start towards a good life in the Visayas. In terms of assistance in securing their dream most felt they would have to rely on their family, and had no expectations from the government. On the whole many of the child soldiers seemed ready to leave the MILF as long as there was some sort of meaningful employment or livelihood opportunity for them. In terms of religious duties, affiliation with the group did not seem to be very strong among our sample, and a possible return to poverty and unemployment proved to be the biggest obstacle to demobilisation and a successful reintegration.

Despite well set out future plans such as Akbar's: 'I want to marry and have a family by 25 years of age and go back to work as a farmer', the child soldiers were completely unsure about future outcomes. Poverty proved to be the main reason for uncertainty and persistent conflict in Mindanao. Despite the desire to demobilise without the family and commander's approval life out of the MILF seemed distant for most. Given that role of the community in recruitment into the MILF is largely facilitative it raises a few contentious issues about possible future reintegration strategies for children associated with the group and merits an informed debate about what 'reintegration' would possibly mean in such a context.

DISCUSSION

From our research it was possible to discern a few trends in youth participation in the MILF and about the Mindanao case more generally.

First, children attached to the MILF seemed to be active agents, rather than helpless victims of coercion, although the family and overall cultural make-up were important influences in decision-making.

Second, there is an extremely limited understanding about reintegration needs of child soldiers in a context like Mindanao, and this inadequacy is reflected in governmental policy and practice which leverages global norms.

Third, the community as an entity differs across conflicts contexts, and in Mindanao, the conflict dynamics are reinforced by the intra-clan feuds which animate relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim tribes hence perpetuating sources of violence in the lives of youth who return to these sites. Finally, there are important lessons to be drawn about how far received wisdom from global practices with respect to child-soldier reintegration can work in Mindanao.

Child Soldiers as Active Agents

In respect of former child soldiers, the dominant view holds that young ex-combatants are traumatised, socially excluded and violent. This typical representation results in images of child soldiers being 'lost' children; 'walking ghosts' and 'damaged, uneducated pariahs'.[42] Much of this pejorative generalisation has come to be contested by a growing body of ethnographic and psychological evidence which offers important empirical support for agency and resilience as the dominant trend in place of

traumatisation and loss.[43] Our findings in Mindanao align with this view, children and youth affiliated with the MILF seem to be much more of an active agent in their recruitment and demobilisation rather than 'lost' in their destinies. They have clear plans about what they would like to do and where, but the challenge is that they have limited opportunities and life chances. Those who choose to leave the MILF ranks have few options but to go back to their families and communities, the very sites and influences that led them to MILF recruitment in the first place. Hence they appear to a large extent, trapped in constraining socio-economic, political and cultural parameters.

Reintegration into What

So far as reintegration options are concerned, a recent survey by Philrights reveals that policies and programmes relevant to child soldiers in the different armed groups in the Philippines adopted by the DSWD (the lead government agency responsible for rehabilitation of former child soldiers) have leveraged global practices, emphasising the community or family as primary sites for reintegration. This primary strategy is backed by various support services in the form of livelihood and financial assistance. Some of the programmes include the '*Bayanihan Centre sa Kalinga*' which provided temporary shelter for the rebel returnees from the NPA in Salay, Misamis Oriental, which have been limited in impact. The Philippine government's amnesty programme called the 'Balik Baril' offers cash in exchange for surrender of weapons to the AFP.[44]

Our civil society interviews in Quezon City suggest that there is no definitive study to ascertain whether reintegration of some 7,000 out of an estimated case load of 30,000 MNLF fighters into the AFP and the Philippines National Police (PNP) has been a success. In fact the MNLF is still demanding full implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement and the entire process has been plagued by large-scale corruption and mismanagement following the coming of former MNLF personnel into governance roles in Mindanao frustrated expectations and warned of the ills of aggrandisement. This experience has marred the substantive context of reintegration in Mindanao, it is at best viewed in a pejorative sense,[45] with participation of youth in groups like the MILF being a fluid association, largely a product of circumstance, sometimes choice, but often sanctioned by family and religious dictates.

Conflict and Community in Mindanao

The community into which former combatants return differs across conflict contexts. Hostility and rejection are important responses which often make reintegration experience of former combatants including child soldiers a difficult process, triggering the need for discovering new social contexts and communal sites away from home communities to begin a new civilian existence. While in several contexts home communities have been documented as being initially hostile as in West Africa, in Mozambique and Angola traditional spiritual healing rituals helped

re-embrace lost members within the community's fold. In Mindanao since, most young soldiers remain in their communities and fight occasionally, the community-combatant interaction is unproblematic. However, return to these presumably 'protective environments' often results in reintroduction into different forms and levels of violence especially *rido* conflicts because of its links to family honour. This is reinforced by periodic inter-group clashes between the Christian and Muslim population as well as governmental strikes on MILF camps and related civilian communities. Hence return of child soldiers from the MILF into a home community which is accustomed to multiple levels of conflict makes reintegration less of a civilianizing process and does not ensure the abdication of violent behaviour in future.

Global Practice on Child Soldier Reintegration: What Lessons for Mindanao?

The main tug of war in current reintegration programming for child soldiers is between the choices of vocational training versus a return to education or catch-up education modules. Given that many former child soldiers demobilise as adults or are matured in terms of their personal and social responsibilities with child and family, former child soldiers often find a return to formal education unremunerative and hence this is a less preferred choice in the light of their economic needs while vocational training modules also have their drawbacks.[46] The critical question pertains to the kind of training and the prevalent market for these skills which should guide programmes. At the same time reintegration approaches have evolved over the years to encompass broader agendas, expanding focus from the ex-combatant group – male, women and children to include the wider civilian community, the disabled, refugees and internally displaced.[47]

In Mindanao, given the unique participation pathways with an important mediatory role for the family and community, following the global template of returning child soldiers to their home communities and in the protective care of their family might create problems for reintegration. Hence the lesson for Mindanao is that, much of the received wisdom with respect to reintegration does not apply, and could be useful only after underlying structural problems and issues of governance failures are addressed. Lack of opportunity for livelihoods and educational access, and isolation, marks the life of the common man on this island and hence broader socio-economic and inter-ethnic, inter-group cleavages together with bottlenecks in political dialogue must be resolved before successful reintegration strategies for former fighters can be implemented.

However these findings need to be tempered with the knowledge that an insider/outsider dichotomy is operative in contexts like Mindanao and while community visits and arranging access through trusted gatekeepers have their benefits, they are not foolproof and need effective triangulation tools by analysing the responses of the different sets of actors. Biases, and the dangers of fabrication and concealment remain, and hence all narratives and self-reports remain subject to scrutiny and need to be cross-checked with more authentic sources of information about socio-economic and religious trends in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

As our study reveals the role of religion in fostering a separate identity is played out strongly in the case of the MILF and the ideology underlying 'Bangsamoro' continues to be rooted in primordial notions of homeland, which find voice in the name of Islam both in terms of territorial connotations rooted in the pre-Hispanic influence of Islam as well as the Islamic governance character later evident in the life of the Sultanates. Youth in communities which display such traits of indoctrination, social marginalization, historical displacement and belief in colonial and post-colonial majoritarian subordination pose the greatest source of instability in evolving democracies. We strongly feel that linkages between macro-level issues of governance and economics need to be borne in mind and linked with the strategies of child-soldier reintegration. The routine practice of reunification or return to the family and community may not be the best approach for reintegration in Mindanao; unless key factors – land reform, ownership, autonomy, cultural recognition of the Moro struggle are honoured within the contours of a mutually accommodative agreement, the grievances and potential for recruitment and participation will remain. Besides, any DDR paradigm of the government will remain at best one-sided policy rhetoric, since the MILF is disinterested in disarming at the moment unless the overarching problems of ancestral domain are addressed.

Another significant challenge for reintegration of children associated with the MILF and other groups in Mindanao is the problem of denial, which permeates from grassroots non-government entities, to government, and international civil society organisations (CSOs) alike. Donor-driven programmes among the CSOs funded through the UK's Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Peace Mindanao programme, has ensured that efforts to build a culture of peace through workshops and advocacy seminars is the main focus for Balay Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Total Human Development (BIRTH-DEV), Ranaw Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRRAC) among others. This hardly addresses the problem of recruitment and reintegration of youth who join armed groups and seek to begin a civilian life.

In an interview with the Mayor of Iligan City, it seemed obvious that while there was full awareness of the issue, it was not considered a problem in terms of being a possible source of insecurity and future conflict escalation. Some of the national CSOs we met in Manila like Philrights and the Philippines Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (PCSUCS) though more aware and active in addressing the child soldier problem, seem to have their hands tied in terms of transcending advocacy in order to offer real solutions. Besides the governmental response to the issue of child soldiers remains mired in legislative jargon with the DSWD putting surrendered child soldier through criminal prosecution as enemy combatants or at best turning them into informants, spies for the government, their reintegration prospects remain mired in ambiguity.

In 2009, an estimated 700,000 people have been reported displaced following government efforts to capture 'rogue' MILF commanders like Brave and Umara

Kato. The MILF itself has been held responsible for some 40 attacks during 2008–09, according to AFP estimates. Besides with an impending change in leadership awaiting the archipelago with President Gloria Arroyo's end of term in 2010, the policy of negotiating with the MILF may shift creating greater uncertainty over the ancestral domain question.

In August 2009, the government unilaterally announced suspension of military attacks, which was reciprocated by the MILF but in light of attacks undertaken by the three commanders against Christian villages in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's rejection of the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain, the government has delinked the issue of its attempt to capture these perpetrators from the broader tenor of the peace process in the South. Some quarters mandate greater international involvement to provide much needed impetus to the nearly stalled peace process. Talks in August did not add any substantive progress to resolution efforts and prominently the issue of factionalism in the MILF remains with Chief Murad Ibrahim openly acknowledging perils for a negotiated peace in light of a more radical younger generation of commanders.[48] Now with the formation of the International Contact Group comprised of Britain, Japan, Turkey, and several international NGOs for monitoring agreements that might be reached in the upcoming talks between the peace panels of the MILF and the government at a meeting scheduled in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, early in December,[49] and brokered by the Malaysian government, the peace card is back on the table and might pave way for highlighting the issue of youth involvement in MILF on the part of the international and national actors.

Hence in our analysis we feel the problem of child soldiers in Mindanao is one of perception and a complete lack of solutions at the reintegration end of the spectrum. Therefore, reintegration strategies for this context would require greater innovation than standard child soldier reintegration packages, which are still largely absent. Our research has shown that the MILF case and the Mindanao experience poses as an important outlier which questions established orthodoxy about family and home community as undisputed caregivers and protective environments and the best place for child-soldier reintegration. In drawing on contemporary wisdom it will be very difficult to address child-soldier recruitment and reintegration problems in Mindanao.

The role of the community in this context can be best harnessed to help de-escalate conventional cycles of violence at the three distinct levels, namely between the GRP and various armed groups, inter-group conflict between Christians and Muslims and *rido* or intra-tribal conflicts. Involvement and participation is often encouraged, and lauded as chivalrous, brave, together with notions of being in the service of God. These cannot be deconstructed without a political peace and resolution of the underlying problems of the Moros in Mindanao.

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NOTES

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2. Blattman *et al.* (note 1); Vera Achvarina and Simon Reich, 'No Place to Hide: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers', *International Security* 31/1 (2006) pp.127–64; Scott Gates and Jens C. Andvig, 'Recruiting Children for Armed Conflict', online at <www.stichtingvredeswetenschappen.nl/Andvig_Gates_Hague.pdf>, accessed 1 Feb. 2008.
3. Allison James and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press 1990) pp.10–14.
4. See UNICEF, Cape Town Principles 1997, p.1, online at <www.unicef.org/emerg/index_child soldiers.html>, accessed 12 Jan. 2008; David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers UP 2005); Michael Wessels and Carlinda Monteiro, 'Psychosocial Assistance for Youth: Toward Reconstruction for Peace in Angola', *Journal of Social Issues* 62/1 (2006) pp.121–39.
5. Amone-P'Olak (note 1); Theresa Betancourt, 'Child Soldiers: Reintegration, Pathways to Recovery and Reflections from the Field', *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 29/2 (2008) pp.138–41; Blattman *et al.* (note 1); Neil Boothby, Alistair Strang and Michael Wessells, *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecologies of Children and War* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press 2006); Wessels and Monteiro (note 4); Brandon A. Kohrt, Mark J. D. Jordans, Wietse A. Tol, Rebecca M. Speckman, Sujen M. Maharjan, Carol M. Worthman, and Ivan H. Komproe, 'Comparison of Mental Health Between Former Child Soldiers and Children Never Conscripted by Armed Groups in Nepal', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 300/6 (Aug. 2008) pp.691–702.
6. See the vast literature on youth in armed conflict: Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers* (Stockholm: Radda Barnen 1996); Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 2004); Helen Brocklehurst, *Who's Afraid of Children?: Children, Conflict and International Relations* (London: Ashgate 2006); Jo Boyden and Joanna Berry, *Children and Youth on the Frontline: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement* (NY/Oxford: Berghahn Books 2004); Ilene Cohn and Guy S Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994); Jason Hart (ed.), *Years of Conflict: Adolescence, Political Violence and Displacement* (NY/London: Berghahn Books 2008); Siobhan McEvoy-Levy (ed.) *Troublemakers or Peacemakers?: Youth and Post Accord Peacebuilding* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame 2006); Boothby *et al.* (note 5) among others.
7. Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation –State* (Manila: Ateneo De Manila UP 2000); Jill Carino and Erni Christian (eds.) *Indigenous Peoples and Local Government: Experiences from Malaysia and the Philippines* (Manila: IWGIA 2005); Jamial A. Kamlian, *Bangsamoro Society and Culture: A Book of Readings on Peace and Development in Southern Philippines* (Iligan City: Iligan Center for Peace Education and Research/MSU-IIT Press 1999) pp.7–9; Samuel K. Tan, *Internationalization of the Bangsamoro Struggle* (Quezon City: Univ. of Philippines Centre for Integrative and Development Struggle 1995); The Bangsamoro people include the Badjao, Sangil, Palawani, Iranun, Kalagan, Tausug, Jama-Mapun, Samal, Kaligbugan, Yakan, Molbog and the more well-known Maguindanao and Maranao.
8. The Muslim population also lives in some parts of Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga del Norte and Davao del Sur. There have traditionally been high concentrations of Muslim population in Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, Zamboanga del Sur and Palawan.
9. The Lumad tribes include Ata, Bagobo, Batak, Bla-an, Bukidnon, Dibabawan, Higuanon, Mamanwa, Mandaya, Mangguangan, Manobo, Mansaka, Matigsalug, Palawan, Subanen, Tagakaolo, Tagbanua, Tboli, Teduray, Ubo. Other groups like the Tigwa, the Isamal, the Kamayo, and Talaandig are generally regarded as sub-tribes. The Lumad groups constitute approximately 5 per cent only of the entire population of the Bangsamoro homeland. Kamlian (note 7) pp.4–5.
10. Peter Chalk, 'Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic Factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao and Aceh', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 24 (2001) pp.241–69; Carino and Christian (note 7); Arskal Salim, '"Sharia from Below" in Aceh (1930s–1960s): Islamic Identity and the Rights to

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11. Jubair 1999 cited in Eddie L. Quitoriano and Francisco M. Theofelize, *Their War, Our Struggle: Stories of Children in Central Mindanao* (Quezon City: Save the Children, UK 2004) p.12.
12. Astrid S. Tuminez, ‘This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines’, *SAIS Review* 27/2 (Summer–Fall 2007) p.78.
13. Astrid S. Tuminez, *Ancestral Domain in Comparative Perspective*, USIP Special Report 151 (Washington DC: USIP Sept. 2005); Dennis S. Erasga, ‘Ancestral Domain Claim: The Case of the Indigenous People in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)’, *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 8/1 (2008) pp.33–44. This displacement and marginalisation was exacerbated under American rule through the passage of restrictive and exclusive legislation such as the Land Registration Act (1902), the Philippine Commission Act 718 (1903), the Public Land Act (1905). These legislative measures were reinforced by large-scale resettlement drives beginning in 1911 together with economic variables which resulted in displacement, most prominently, introduction of the plantation economy such as rubber and coconut plantations in Basilan and Zamboanga. These processes of demographic reorganisation continued under the post-colonial Philippine government till the 1960s and significantly altered the demographic map of Mindanao and accompanying property ownership and governance institutions. See Tuminez, ‘This Land is Our Land’ (note 12) esp. pp.79–80.
14. Quitoriano and Theofelize (note 11).
15. The beginnings of ASG are traced back to training camps in Afghanistan during the 1980s. In 1987, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani travelled to Pakistan and made contact with Osama bin Laden, Abdur Rab Rasul Sayaaf, and Ramzi Yousef. The experience introduced Janjalani to jihadist ideology, and motivated him to start a jihadist group in the Philippines. From its inception, ASG defined itself according to its ethnic Moro identity, but its goals extended further than independence.
16. Robert Muggah, *Assessing the Prospects for DDR of the MILF in Mindanao: A Desk Review and Evaluation for the UNDP* (NY/Manila: UNDP 2004).
17. See the latest poverty statistics of the Philippines at their official website, <www.nscbp.ph/poverty>, accessed 13 Sept. 2009.
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20. Following are camps of the MILF, namely Camp Abu Bakar as Siddique (North Cotabato border with Maguindanao); Camp Bushra Somiorang (outside Butig in Lanao del Sur); Camp Bilal (outside Ansar in Lanao del Norte); Camp Rajamuda (Northern Cotabato near Maguindanao border), Camp Darapanan/Usama bin Zaid (outside Sultan Kudarat town, Maguindanao), Camp Omar Ibn al-Khatab (Maguindanao), Camp Badre (Maguindanao) were main centres of training and community life for MILF supporters and cadres. See Abuza, ‘The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution’ (note 19).
21. Abuza, ‘The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution’ (note 19).

22. Joseph C. Liow, *Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines: Religion, Ideology and Politics*, Policy Studies 24 (Washington DC: East-West Center 2006), online at <www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS024.pdf>, accessed 8 Sept. 2009.
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24. See McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (note 19); E. R. Mercado. *Southern Philippines Question – The Challenge of Peace and Development*, Center for Policy Advocacy and Strategic Studies at the Notre Dame University, Occasional Paper Series, 1 (Notre Dame Press: Cotabato City 1999); Milligan, 'Teaching between the Cross and the Crescent Moon' (note 19); J. A. Milligan, 'Islamization or Secularization? Educational Reform and the Search for Peace in the Southern Philippines'' *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 7/1 (2004) pp.30–38; M. D. Vitug and G. M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs/Institute for Popular Democracy 2000).
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26. Jeffrey R. Seul, '"Ours is the Way of God": Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research* 36/5 (1999) pp.553–69; Quitoriano and Theofelize (note 11).
27. Ghislaine Loyre de Hautecloque, 'Community among the Maguindanaons and other Muslim Ethnic Groups' in Charles J. H. Macdonald and Guillermo M. Pesigan (eds.) *Old Ties and New Solidarities: Studies on Philippine Communities* (Manial: Ateneo de UP 2000) p.92.
28. Ibid. p.95.
29. Camp Busrah, and later Camps Bilal, Rajamuda, Darapanan, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab and Badre and Camp Abu Bakr were some of the prominent MILF camps.
30. Tuminez, 'This Land is Our Land' (note 12) p.83.
31. L. C. Lacar, 'Familism Among Muslims and Christians in the Philippines', *Philippine Studies* 43/1 (1995) pp. 40–48.
32. Interview with Abdul H. T. Atar, RIDO Inc., Iligan Ccity, 27 Sept. 2008.
33. Interview with Mr Pancho Guevera, Manila, 21 Sept. 2008.
34. It appeared from group discussions we conducted that *rido* conflicts have proliferated largely because of an absentee government which prompts resolution of disputes and other conflicting issues through clan violence. Interview with Prof. Jamial Kamilian, Dept. of History, MUS-IIT, Iligan City, 26 Sept. 2008.
35. Philippines Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (PCSUCS), *Development of a Community-Based Demobilization Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DRR) Framework for CIAC in the Philippines* (Quezon City: PCSUCS 2007).
36. Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, *Child Soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao, Philippines* (Geneva: ILO 2002). Interview with Ms Joeven Reyes, SULONG CARHRIHL, Quezon City, Philippines, 30 Sept. 2008; Mr Ryan Silverio, PCSUCS, Quezon City, 30 Sept. 2008; Mr Neil Paulin, Lawyer, Iligan City, 27 Sept. 2008; Interview with Ms Myriam, Director, Kapamagogopa Inc., Iligan City, 28 Sept. 2008; Ms Tina Lomjlo, BIRTH-DEV, Iligan City, 26 Sept. 2008. International protocols on protection of CIAC are augmented by national provisions including but not limited to the Republic Act 7610 (Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination); Republic Act 8371 (Indigenous Peoples Rights Act); and the Inter-Agency Memorandum of Agreement on the Handling and Treatment of Children in Armed Conflict. Among other legislative protections, in Nov. 2001, the President issued Executive Order (EO) 56, known as the Comprehensive Framework Program for CIAC and initiated cooperation between NGOs, armed groups and the government. The Executive Order 56 led to the formation of the Inter-Agency Committee for CIAC, composed of national line agencies of government. This Committee drafted a memorandum of agreement outlining procedures for treatment of children who surrender or are rescued by the AFP, police, and later placed under governmental custody namely the DSWD. There is no clarity on whether civil society actors are part of the EO 56 process. In fact, the CIAC does not form part of any peace talks with any group. Besides the government has also been reluctant to raise this as a topic due to the sensitivity of the issue especially given that all conflict parties are responsible for recruitment and use of children inconsistent with legal provisions.
37. United Nations, *Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines*, S/2008/272, 24 April 2008, online at <www.un.org/Docs/sc/sgrep08.htm>, accessed 12 Jan. 2009.
38. The *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, pp.277–78, suggests that based on a 2005 estimate, approximately 13 per cent of MILF's 10,000 members are underage, online at <www.childsoldiers globalreport.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2008.

39. A traditional target for MILF and GRP clashes, it was attacked, burned and occupied in 2000 mainly due to its majority Christian population.
40. Interview with Ustad Karim, teacher, Madrassah Evacuation Centre, Iligan City and Focus Group Discussion, Kauswagan, Mindanao, 28 Sept. 2008.
41. PhilRights, *Deadly Play Grounds: The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Philrights 2005) pp.37–39. These are part-time paramilitary units attached to and subsidised by the Philippine Army. It consists of local civilians led by a 'cadre' or a regular soldier from the Philippine Army (usually a sergeant).
42. Michael Wessels, 'Children Armed Conflict and Peace', *Journal of Peace Research* 35/5 (1998) pp.635–46.
43. Susan Shepler, 'The Social and Cultural Context of Child Soldiering in Sierra Leone', Paper presented at the Techniques of Violence in Civil War Workshop at Peace Research Institute, Oslo 20–21 Aug. 2004, online at <www.prio.no/cscw/pdf/micro/techniqes/shepler%20child%20 soldiers.pdf> accessed 1 Feb. 2007; Neil Boothby, John Crawford, and John Halperin, 'Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study: Lessons Learned in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts', *Global Public Health* 1/1 (2006) pp.87–107; Wessels and Monteiro (note 4).
44. PhilRights (note 41) p.61.
45. Focus Group Discussion, Kauswagan, Mindanao, 28 Sept. 2008 and Interview with Prof. J. Kamilian, Dept. of History, MSU-IIT, Iligan City, 26 Sept. 2008. Land reform i.e. democratisation of land ownership is not an MILF rallying point, and was never implemented by the MNLF, hence the socio-economic distribution of land is outside the scope of the Moro struggle for homeland as embodied in the demand for ancestral domain. For a detailed discussion see Abuza, 2005 (note 19).
46. Alpaslan Özerdem, *Post-war Recovery: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration* (London: I.B. Tauris 2008).
47. Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder, *Reinsertion Assistance and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in War to Peace Transitions*, Thematic Working Paper 4 (Univ. of Bradford, UK: Centre for International Cooperation and Security July 2008) pp.12–13.
48. Simon Roughneen, 'Peace dances in the Philippines', online at <www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KH01Ae02.html>, accessed 12 Sept. 2009.
49. Online at <www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/297335,philippines-to-resume-talks-with-muslim-rebels-next-week.html>, accessed 1 Dec. 2009.