

Understanding Recruitment to Violent Extremism in Mindanao

Gail Tan-Ilagan

Ateneo de Davao University, Philippines

ABSTRACT: This report consolidates the findings of four case studies on the recruitment to violent extremism in Mindanao. Using good faith data collection methods, these case studies yielded information on the identity of the recruiting groups, the profile of their target recruits, the process of recruitment, and the opportunities exploited by these groups in insinuating the alternative for aligning the Bangsamoro with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) during the first six months of the Duterte Administration. Implications of recruitment to ISIS-inspired groups are analyzed in the context of the stalled Mindanao peace process. Recommendations are forwarded to strengthen community resilience against radicalization and harmonize efforts of various sectors to counter the narratives for recruitment to violent extremism.

KEYWORDS: *Extremism, Mindanao, recruitment, Bangsamoro, peace, ISIS*

Introduction

The Aquino Administration signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014, but failed to pass the much-awaited Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). While vowing strong support to the Mindanao peace process, the succeeding Duterte Administration has been slow to bank on the momentum of the enthusiasm generated by the public consultations after the CAB signing and in anticipation of the BBL implementation. Months after Duterte's inauguration, it has become apparent that the CAB will not be implemented any time soon, resulting in a marked dampening of optimism.

This latest denial of the promised right to self-determination resurrected the string of mutually reinforcing and cross-validating grievances of the Bangsamoro people. For some quarters, this became a cause for disenchantment. The peace process is argued to be a futile exercise and should be rejected in favor of the true *jihad* toward bringing the Bangsamoro under a pan-Islamic caliphate.

The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) provides a convenient direction for the disenchanted to rally for the creation of this caliphate. In June 2014, the ISIS proclaimed its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Caliph of the Islamic State, “leader for Muslims everywhere.”¹ On 23 July 2014, videos were uploaded on YouTube showing members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) led by Isnilon Hapilon and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) pledging allegiance to the ISIS and to al-Baghdadi.² In the months that followed, other groups followed suit and stakeholders to peace in Mindanao began to express worries about the inroads of violent extremism, with an increasing variety of reported activities reflecting possible extremist sympathies.

The initial response of the Philippine government was to reject the news,³ but the security sector has since veered away from its dismissive stance to show its deep concern today for the growing influence of violent extremism in the country. These last three years have seen a number of reports pointing to the reality of recruitment by groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS especially among those based in Mindanao.

This paper aims to draw the picture of recruitment to groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS and increased receptivity toward violent extremism in the context of the community conditions where the recruitment happens. These developments are examined against the backdrop of community perception of the Mindanao peace prospects.

Methodology

This paper discusses findings from good faith data gathering methods employed in the last quarter of 2016 in Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga City, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Cotabato City, and Maguindanao. A variety of qualitative methods were employed, such as key informant interviews (KIIs) with members of extremist groups and confidential interviews in person, by phone, or through email with their relatives and neighbors, as well as with leaders from the out-of-school and in-school youth, women, religious, academe, intelligence, government, and non-state sectors and young Muslim professionals. Focus group discussions (FGD) were also held and validation visits to camps identified to be the stronghold of some of these groups were conducted in Maguindanao. In particular, campus observations in Zamboanga, Marawi, and Cotabato were also mined for information that could be further corroborated from community sources. To further validate the data from the ground reports, this author reviewed news reports, books, and internet sources and interviewed development workers and military commanders. Data from these sources were used to provide the background and analyze the implications of events unfolding in the affected communities.

Results

Background on Muslim separatism and the Bangsamoro peace process

Muslim separatism in the Philippines emerged in May 1968, two months after the Jabidah Massacre, when former Cotabato governor Datu Udtog Matalam issued a manifesto for the declaration of the Muslim Independent Movement (MIM). The MIM's avowed aim was the establishment of an Islamic State in predominantly Muslim areas of Mindanao, namely, in the contiguous areas of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan inhabited by the Muslims, such as Cotabato, Davao, Zamboanga and Zamboanga City, Basilan City, Lanao, Sulu, Palawan, including the maritime areas therein. But all too soon, the MIM faded out of the talk between then President Marcos and

Datu Udtog. What followed was the secret training of the Top 90 in Palau Pangkor, State of Perak, Malaysia, who in turn became the initial Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) members.

For over two decades since 1972, the MNLF became the leading group among Muslim secessionists. Headed by Nur Misuari, the MNLF was accorded observer status by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), thereby strengthening the MNLF's bargaining power with the succession of presidential administrations that engaged it in peace talks. The OIC laid the territorial integrity of the Philippines as a condition of its support to the MNLF. The latter, thus, could not push for Moro independence if it wanted to remain in the good graces of the OIC. From its original separatist position, the MNLF would sign in 1976, and then again in 1996, peace pacts with the government that aimed to provide the Bangsamoro meaningful autonomy under the Philippine state.

Former MNLF vice chairman Sheikh Salamat Hashim bolted out of the MNLF in 1977 and formally announced the establishment of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984 (Rodil 2003). For a while the MILF stood for the implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit; it was generally silent during the duration of the peace negotiations between the government and the MNLF. But after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in September 1996, it proclaimed the resumption of the Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination, its sights firmly aimed at independence. The assertion for Bangsamoro independence was among the reasons that led to the breakaway of the MILF in the late 1970s and of the ASG about a decade later. At the time of their respective departure from the MNLF, both groups had pledged to pursue the separatist agenda, igniting violence to pursue their political grievance.

In January 1997, the MILF in turn entered into peace negotiations with the government that would last for close to eighteen years, culminating in the signing of the CAB on 27 March 2014. Six years earlier, the MILF faced questions on its ability to discipline its troops when three commanders razed Christian villages in Sarangani, North Cotabato, and Lanao del Norte in frustration over the non-signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). The MILF claimed it did not sanction the attacks.

The MILF was quick to explain that the actions of these “rogue” commanders were motivated by frustration and distrust in the government’s sincerity. It might have very well been the case also that these commanders were disgruntled by the failure of the MILF Central Command to get the MOA-AD signed. Among these commanders, Ameril Umra Kato eventually broke away from the MILF to form the BIFF, reiterating the need for the Bangsamoro to secede. Another commander, Abdullah Makapaar (a.k.a. Commander Bravo) eventually returned to the MILF fold and was even promoted to his position today as Commanding Officer in northwestern Mindanao. Similarly, the MILF went along with Sulaiman Pangalian’s denial that it was his command that engaged in post-MOA-AD violence. He is now the MILF vice chair. The government did not pursue charges against Makapaar and Pangalian.

In September 2011, the MILF officially cut ties with Kato and the 300 MILF troops from the 105th Base Command that he took with him to Maguindanao. Kato died in 2015, leaving behind a smaller force that had evidently splintered some more. But even during its heyday, the BIFF did not command enough numbers to interest the government to invite it to the negotiating table.

From the foregoing, the organized armed struggle for Muslim nationhood in the Philippines appears to have a very short history going back fifty years or so. The fight for separate nationhood has lost its steam among its main armed components. For the MNLF that had some of its former combatants integrated into the Philippine Army (PA) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), the prospect of fighting its own would prove to be a deterrent. The MILF, on the other hand, is still optimistic that the Duterte Administration would pursue the commitments made under the CAB for meaningful Bangsamoro autonomy. Moreover, both the MNLF and the MILF had cooperated with government efforts to prepare and encourage the Bangsamoro constituency to accept the political solution they had respectively negotiated with the government. However, these public consultations and information had mostly been done in major cities and had not penetrated the hinterlands, especially in Sulu and Basilan.⁴

The failure to implement peace agreements brought frustration and created avenues for extremism to gain a foothold in Mindanao. The Maute Group of Lanao is the latest to emerge from such disappointment, this time over the failure to pass the BBL.⁵ What seems historically evident is that, as the government failed post-1976, post-1996, and post-2014 to actually implement meaningful autonomy, there arises a radical fringe to challenge the Moro mainstream each time the peace process moves forward.

The recruiters

Among the local armed groups identified to have pledged allegiance to the ISIS and its leadership in the last three years are the ASG⁶ operating in Basilan, Zamboanga, and Sulu; the Ansar al-Khalifa Philippines (AKP) that is believed to be active in Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and Cotabato,⁷ the Khalifa Islamiya Movement (KIM) and the Maute Group (a.k.a., Dawlah Islamiya and IS-Ranao) in Lanao del Sur, the Dawlah Fi Islamiya Cotabato (DFIC) in Cotabato City, and the BIFF (and their allies among rogue elements of the MILF⁸) in the Maguindanao-Lanao del Sur area.⁹

As will be discussed later, there are indications that indeed these different groups actively share training and tactical resources and cooperate to mount violent attacks. Most of them operate in small groups of thirty or so, but have the lethal capability to produce improvised explosive devices (IED). What is more alarming is the seeming lack of restraint these groups have in targeting civilians and potentially igniting *rido* by killing other Moros.

A brief background on these groups is provided below:

1. **Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).** The ASG broke away from the MNLF in the early 1990s when it disagreed with the MNLF's decision to pursue autonomy. The ASG was founded by Basilan-born Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani who had studied and traveled in the Middle East. Upon his return to the Philippines in 1989, he gathered other disillusioned ex-MNLF members and formed the Mujahedeen Commando Freedom Fighters (MCFF) to

revive the call for Muslim separatism. In 1991, Janjalani renamed the group in honor of an Afghan resistance fighter, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.¹⁰

Almost immediately upon its founding, the ASG quickly gained notoriety for the violent means it employed targeting Christians and foreigners in Zamboanga, Basilan, Tawi-tawi and Sulu. It provided consistent resistance to government troops, enjoying as it did training and funding support from the Al Qaeda.

When Janjalani died in 1998, however, the foreign funding seemed to have dried up. The ASG splintered into factions that turned to high profile kidnap-for-ransom (KFR) activities for survival, prompting the military to mount Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines in 2002.¹¹ The counterterrorism efforts neutralized some key ASG figures, but the ASG would consolidate again to carry out mass casualty terrorism activities such as the 2004 Superferry 14 bombing that killed 116 and the 2005 Valentine Day bombings.¹²

In 2007, the ASG factions again turned to kidnapping, threatening to behead hostages unless ransom was paid. It had by then built a KFR industry network of community supporters in Zamboanga, Basilan and Sulu that identify, secure and pass around hostages until the ransom demand is met and everyone involved can share in the spoils. Thus, the ASG had started to project an image of banditry and criminality, and less of the ideology-backed movement for Muslim separatism that it claimed at the start.

Military commanders opined that the series of videos uploaded on YouTube in July 2014 which showed Hapilon and other ASG members pledging allegiance to ISIS was merely an opportunistic bandwagon attempt to court ISIS funding. But recent developments indicate that ISIS may have reconsidered providing support to the ASG. In January 2016, ISIS publicly accepted the earlier video pledges of allegiance including the ones showing the Abu Dujana, Abu Khubaib, Jundallah, and the Abu Sadr Battalions of the ASG. And in April 2016, the ISIS weekly newsletter Al Naba reported that Hapilon had been appointed as emir in Southeast Asia.

To date, the ISIS is yet to declare a formal *wilayat* (province) in the Philippines, but community sources said that Hapilon had apparently embraced the ISIS appointment and had even recently traveled to the mainland in Lanao to recruit MILF's Commander Bravo to the ISIS cause in the hopes that the latter had been disenchanted enough by the slow progress of the MILF's peace agreement with the government.¹³ He was reportedly turned down.¹⁴ A news report in late January 2017 said that Hapilon and his men were among those injured by an airstrike unleashed by the Philippine Air Force against the Maute Group in Butig (Zambrano 2016).

2. Ansar al-Khalifa Philippines (AKP). Formerly known as Jemaah Islamiyah Philippines, the AKP was led by Basit Usman until his death on 3 May 2015 in the hands of the MILF. The AKP was revealed to have close association with the Malaysian bomber Zulkifli bin Hir (a.k.a., Marwan) who was neutralized on 25 January 2015 during the disastrous Mamasapano encounter that left forty-four police commandos, eighteen MILF soldiers,¹⁵ and five civilians dead.

Usman left behind followers trained in bomb-making and when the AKP leadership was passed to former BIFF field commander Mohammad Jaafar Maguid, a.k.a., Commander Tokboy, he moved the base to Palimbang in Sultan Kudarat and renamed the organization as Ansar Khalifa Sarangani (AKS). Tokboy ran military training for militant groups that had pledged allegiance to the ISIS at a camp in Barangay Daliao, Maasim in Sarangani using AKP members trained at bomb-making as instructors. The AKP has operational links with the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur,¹⁶ perhaps the most aggressive ISIS allegiant in Indonesia.

The group grabbed headlines again with its failed bombing of the US Embassy on 28 November 2016 and the subsequent arrest of four of its Bulacan-based members who had allegedly planned the attack. In early January 2017, security forces mounted a successful operation that killed Tokboy thereby rendering the AKP leaderless for the moment (Canoy 2017).

Mohammad Reza Kiram, the 26-year-old native of Zamboanga who was shown in a 21 June 2016 Telegram video to have participated in the beheading of three Caucasians in Syria, is alleged to be a member of the AKP. In the video, Kiram exhorts ISIS supporters who cannot get to Syria to go instead to the Philippines (Ressa 2017).

3. Khalifa Islamiya Movement (KIM). The KIM is a shadowy group said to have been organized in early 2012 by Ustadz Humam Abdul Najid. The KIM has fashioned itself as the leading force behind the Black Flag Movement in the Philippines (BFMP), striving to popularize this emblem through social media and in lightning display during public gatherings. Najid's followers call him the Al-Zarqawi of the Philippines, referring to his striking resemblance to the Jamal al Tawhid wal Jihad (JTJ) founder who died in 2006.¹⁷

Community sources, however, claim that the KIM was initiated sometime in 2010 or 2011 by a small militant group that called itself the *Ghuraba*.¹⁸ The Ghuraba began calling itself the JTJ in 2013 or 2014 and later on as KIM when it conducted several operations against the security apparatus of the state.¹⁹ The KIM blatantly uses the ISIS flag on social media, sometimes daring to let it out briefly in public during rallies and school conferences for the photo opportunity. Community sources aver that the KIM and the Maute Group referred to by the security sector are one and the same.²⁰ Apparently, they operate so closely that their own neighbors could not tell them apart.

4. Maute Group. Brothers Abdullah and Omar Maute, sons of Mindanao State University (MSU)-Marawi engineering alumnus Cayamora Maute,²¹ created the Khalifa Islamiyah Mindanao in 2012. In April 2015, the group pledged support to the ISIS. The group had claimed several names, including Islamic State of Lanao, Daulat Ul Islamiya, Daulah Islamiyah (or Dawlah Islamiya), Islamic State in southern Philippines, Islamic State–East Asia, IS-Ranao, and Lions of IS Ranao. For ease of recall, the government refers to it as the Maute Group.

Cayamora's second wife came from a rich Indonesian family, believed to have funded the education of his sons. Both Abdullah and Omar had attended local *madrasah* (Islamic school, plural *madaris*) and *Qur'an Tahfidh* (institution for Qur'an memorization). Abdullah obtained his Islamic education at Al Mu'tah University in Jordan while Omar completed his Islamic degree at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. The brothers had also visited Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Omar married an Indonesian who is believed to be related to Ustadz Sanusi,²² a suspected JI terrorist slain in November 2012 in a safe house allegedly owned by the Maute family in Barangay Salaam inside the MSU-Marawi campus (Dizon 2012).

Community sources estimate the strength of the Maute Group at 100 to 300.²³ What seems to be distinctive about IS-Ranao is that it appears to explicitly aim to recruit higher capacity young people to replace the aging generation of Moro leaders.²⁴ All those interviewed on the Maute Group claim that its membership has infiltrated the faculty of various universities and the local madaris. Mostly, the Maute Group is described to include students and young professionals coming from respectable families²⁵ whose parents are either working abroad or are in government employ. Some are children of teachers in the madaris. But recently, the ranks of the Maute have expanded to include lawless elements and those involved in rido. A former classmate of Abdullah claimed that the latter recently counted some Coco Scam operators²⁶ among his members.

The group has its base in Butig in proximity to the MILF's Camp Busra where the MILF-Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) Northeastern Front Command under Jannati Mimbantas is based. The Maute Group runs a training camp harboring foreign bomb-making instructors. It had in the past year been subject of massive military operations, even as it performed IED attacks, atrocities, assassinations, the brief occupation of the Butig town hall (Merez 2016), and at least one jailbreak to liberate some of its members (Unson 2016a).

The protracted siege of Butig projects that the Maute Group has the force to mount considerable resistance and may thus be larger than previously

estimated. Butig residents however say that some of those who figured in the fighting were not really extremists, but were locals who took out their guns for self-defense, rogue MILF fighters who happened to find the Butig siege an opportunity to express their frustration over the stalled peace process, and family members from other places who had brought arms to Butig to aid or rescue their relatives who had joined the Maute Group.²⁷

Indeed, the Maranaw value for *kapamagawida*—of providing assistance to those in need—would naturally emerge in situations when Muslim brothers are besieged by non-Muslims. When those who are under attack happen to be blood relations, it becomes a matter of family honor and *maratabat* (pride) to come to their aid. In Butig, as in many places in Mindanao where the history of conflict marks the soldier as the common enemy, it does not matter sometimes who the soldier is coming for. The response of the local populace would be to defend the territory against enemy invasion.²⁸

Sustaining the military attack, therefore, would likely drag in more locals in defense of their community. It will also drag in people from other places who will go to the Butig arena not necessarily to fight for the Islamic State, but to aid one of their own or to inflict damage on the common enemy (the soldiers). It will also give the frustrated among the MILF combatants in the area much temptation to join in the fray. The exigencies of combat, however, sometimes forego the dignity of distinguishing those who fall in battle.

There are indications that the Butig resistance has external support. Businessmen and politicians had reportedly been approached for donations.²⁹ Local gun runners are wondering where the guns are coming from, indicating that the firearms are provided by external sources.³⁰ The steady flow of bank deposits through automated teller machines (ATM) to the account of Maute Group members suggests that these come from outside Marawi where banking operations are more reliable.³¹

5. Dawlah Fi Islamiya Cotabato (DFIC). The DFIC emerged in late 2016 with the arrest of three of its members in connection with the 2 September night market bombing in Davao City which claimed fifteen lives (Santiago

2016). Included in the roundup was the alleged triggerman, TJ Macabalang, a 30-year-old Cotabato resident who ran a roadside print shop. Early reports on the arrest identified Macabalang and his companions as members of the Maute Group (Unson 2016b). On 29 October, the foiled attempt to bomb the ARMM headquarters during a presidential visit led to the arrest of four more suspects who claimed membership to the DFIC (Unson 2016).

The DFIC is suspected to have tactical alliance with the Maute Group and the AKP. Indeed, upon his arrest, the neighbors and business patrons of Macabalang claimed that he often took calls from foreigners and received bearded visitors from Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Lanao who were overheard to harp about jihad and the Islamic State.

6. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). The BIFF is the armed component of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) that was formed when it split from the MILF in 2010. It was headed by former MILF 105th Base Commander Ameril Umra Kato until his death on 14 April 2015. The BIFF was officially disavowed by the MILF in 2011, shortly after the resumption of the peace negotiations in January that year. The BIFF is active in the area of Shariff Aguak, Pagatin, Mamasapano and Salibo (SPMS box) in Maguindanao.

The BIFF was among the first to pledge allegiance to the ISIS in July 2014. And to emphasize the fact, BIFF Spokesman Abu Misry Mama even bragged about this “alliance with the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi” in a telephone interview with *Agence France-Presse* three weeks later.

Indeed, Ismael Abubakar (a.k.a. Commander Bungos), Kato’s successor, is known to be more radical in his support for the ISIS. However, it appears that this alliance was not agreeable to all. The declaration of allegiance prompted the July 2016 breakaway of BIFF’s more moderate members under Imam Minimbang (a.k.a. Kagi Karianan) who reiterated their loyalty to the cause of the Moro (Muslims in Mindanao) people (Fernandez 2016).

The likely recruits

Recruitment to the ISIS ideology targets two kinds of status seekers. In areas long languishing due to government neglect, armed conflict, and lawlessness, the recruits are likely to be young, dispossessed males who lack education and economic opportunities and have personally suffered the loss of family members during violent encounters with government troops. They have witnessed their ancestral land being grabbed and their fishing grounds taken over by outsiders with the complicity of the government and as enforced by state security forces.³² Thus the simmering resentment lingers, especially for those orphaned from clashes with government forces.

Such appears to be the case in Basilan, Sulu, and the rural areas of Maguindanao and the Lanao provinces, where the ASG and the BIFF are attracting disgruntled youth to channel their frustration in the fight for the creation of a wilayat within the Philippine territory. In Basilan, ASG members offer their relatives and peers the chance to be taught how to read Arabic³³ so as to be able to read the Qur'an and get to know more about the Islamic faith, attracting youth as young as ten years old to join the ASG in their isolated mountain hideouts. Some are further given financial enticements going as high as Php5,000 to leave to their families. The ASG feeds those who come for *pagpangadji* (seeking knowledge) and *ibadat* (worship) and includes them in their Qur'an-based lectures and communal prayer. This period in the recruitment reportedly runs to three months.³⁴

The Maute Group, the DFIC, and the AKP, on the other hand, recruit from more urbanized centers in the mainland, targeting earnest university students and young professionals who seek a deeper meaning to their faith and yearn to be part of the glorious destiny promised of true believers,³⁵ for who, indeed, does not want to enter Paradise?³⁶ They are likely to be disillusioned by the failure of those who came before to assert for the creation of an independent state for the Filipino Muslims and feel betrayed by prominent political clans that have enriched themselves in government service. They deride the MNLF and the MILF for negotiating with the government. For

them, armed groups who negotiate with the government are anti-jihad,³⁷ and they are quick to criticize this aspiration as deplorably lacking.

Across all the study areas, there is general concurrence that the Bangsamoro peace process has dragged on for too long with little concrete gains to show. Opinions in Cotabato on the protracted peace process explain it as a “failed experiment,” “a delaying tactic for counter-insurgency,” and an “opportunity for spoilers to accumulate more wealth.”³⁸ A Lanao del Norte *aleem* expressed that the revision of the BBL proposed by Senator Bongbong Marcos waters down the Shari’a (Islamic Law) which, he opined, is an act of “wholesale sabotage” and a renewed attempt to accomplish the liquidation of Islam in Mindanao.³⁹

The mood on prospects for the Bangsamoro peace process is punctuated by uncertainty. Unlike the excited flurry of information dissemination campaign on the peace process that characterized the final months of the Aquino Administration, there has been little attempt thus far to involve the Bangsamoro populace in determining the policy directions of the current administration. However, the new president still enjoys much popularity among Filipino Muslims—especially because his claim to having Maranao blood renders him worthy of trust⁴⁰ and also because of his public acceptance of Misuari.⁴¹ Duterte is seen as a leader with strong political will and decisiveness, thus his final program on the peace process is cautiously anticipated all over the study areas. The inclusion of the MNLF in crafting the BBL and the proposed federalism alternative are regarded as positive options toward resolving the Bangsamoro question, even as there is lingering doubt that, as with the presidents that came before him, Duterte might similarly employ a policy of containment that would interminably postpone its resolution.⁴²

Recruiters exploit this uncertain fate of the peace process, arguing that it is only proceeding toward an outcome that will not realize the aspiration for an independent homeland for the Moro people. This gives them the opening to insinuate the aspiration for the return of the caliphate where the Moros should rightfully belong. For the Bangsamoro to have to accept anything less than an independent homeland will echo the humiliation suffered by the global

Muslim people when they lost their unity and independence in 1924 upon the abolition of the caliphate. Thus, fostering this sense of identification with the global Muslim experience is done through films showing the rape and killing of Islam believers in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya), as well as the burning of mosques and houses in Burma.⁴³ The non-passage of the BBL is cited as another instance of denial of the people's right to self-determination, thus the need for an Islamic *Khalifa* (caliphate). Whatever political grievance could be latched on—and there are plenty—the propaganda messages converge on a singular call: The need for an Islamic Khalifa.

These details of global Muslim history and their significance in the Filipino Muslim experience are higher education topics that can be appreciated after much library work and instruction on world history or by consulting learned Islamic scholars. Thus, major colleges in the cities of Marawi, Iligan, Cagayan de Oro, Cotabato, Sulu, and Zamboanga have been identified to be hotbeds of recruitment for violent extremism. Local opinion suggests however that ASG recruitment in Zamboanga City universities had dried up in the last three years owing to more vigilant measures employed by school authorities and the security sector after the September 2013 Zamboanga siege.⁴⁴

In mainland Mindanao, mosques and madaris, especially those funded by Saudi money,⁴⁵ are reported to be places where potential recruits are identified through their devout worship, their regular participation in Islamic seminars, and the kind of earnest questions they ask during such gatherings. While the *toril* or boarding schools may confine their students and potentially render them captive to extremist indoctrination, there is little indication of the success of mass recruitment if indeed such is being attempted in these places.

The narrative for recruitment to extremism

For centuries, Muslim scholars have failed to resolve certain fundamental topics that have since divided the Muslim world into various sects since the Prophet Mohammad's death in 632 C.E. According to a religious leader, these topics are used in community recruitment to extremism.⁴⁶ These include interpretations of the Islamic *aqueeda* (creed) or belief, the nature of the true

jihad, who the true followers of Islam are, the necessity of khalifa, and what *bid'a* (deviation from accepted ways) are in Islam.⁴⁷

The fundamentalist view on these topics was carried in the teachings of Egyptian scholars in Saudi universities in the 1970s⁴⁸ and brought to the Philippines by way of foreign missionaries, their influential converts, and local scholars back from studies abroad who found the opportunity to propagate these during Islamic seminars, Friday sermons at the mosque, and in discussion circles at different institutions of learning. Among the potential recruits' milieu, these propagators have much social prestige and can attract an audience among the young without opposition from parents and other authorities who unwittingly sanction the contact in the belief that their young are undergoing necessary Islamic education. Parents and elders often realize too late the extremist intent of these religious instructions.

Not surprisingly, recruitment can happen in the home when a new convert seeks to include his own family members. While blood relatives may not necessarily subscribe to the extremist ideology, the knowledge of a family member's involvement primes them to provide support to keep him safe. Under dire circumstances, the family may even be moved to call in debts of honor and family connections to come to the aid of one of their own.

Even those in the community who claim to abhor the extremist ideology have to stand aside when their own kin engage in violent acts or, short of accomplishing the violent acts themselves, procure for their kin what they might eventually use to pursue their extremist ends.⁴⁹ It is said that communities in Basilan and Sulu have grown inured to the beheading of ASG kidnap victims and cannot speak out for fear of reprisal.⁵⁰ Some betray their true sympathies by justifying this heinous act because the victim is *kafir* (non-Muslim).⁵¹ Apparently, some impoverished communities in the islands tolerate the ASG because they benefit from the group's lucrative KFR activities (Alipala 2017). Stories abound that part of ransom money is used to help people who need money for hospitalization, medicine, education, food and other basic necessities.

More recently, extremist views find expression in social media that students and young professionals can engage in relative privacy. Social media sites like the ARMM Watch⁵² page on Facebook (FB) post extremist sentiments. One can also easily download from YouTube *Naseeha* (lectures) delivered by Al Qaeda's Anwar Awlaki and Osama bin Laden, as well as those of JI leader Riduan Isammudin (a.k.a. Hambali).⁵³

Digital connection is getting to be a way of life and the ability to effortlessly navigate the medium carries prestige points in the youthful social milieu. The social media consumption and participation of the young largely go unmonitored. Especially for the youth seeking identity, belongingness, and a reason to believe, social media produces new heroes and heroic aspirations that could be far removed from one's immediate location, such as ISIS personalities and events that trend among international audiences. With a little planning, one can with anonymity and impunity assume a manufactured identity, such as presenting to be an extremist or extremist sympathizer in this medium.

In public, *niqabis* (women who wear garbs that fully cover the body except for the eyes) enjoy similar anonymity when unfurling the ISIS flag to attract public attention during peace rallies in campus, such as happened on 17 July 2014 at the MSU-Marawi Peace Plaza.⁵⁴ In this way, public events that seek to build constituency for the Bangsamoro are hijacked to impress upon the participants issues of injustice in the global Muslim scene. The daring move serves to raise the actors' social prestige in the eyes of their peers and may even attract recruits among admirers.

Where the internet is yet to be reliable, the extremist message is carried over short wave radio channels, such as on the 14.791 MHz and 14.954 MHz frequencies broadcast in the Lanao area.⁵⁵ With anonymity and impunity, the mouthpiece disseminates aspects of the violent extremist narrative and updates on ISIS gains in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It is also used to issue verbal attacks on Islamic moderates, such as the local *ulama* (Muslim scholars) and those whose actions are perceived to be in collaboration with the *kaffur* (unbelievers). These radio channels propagate indictment as

haraam (forbidden) much of the customary practices of moderates, such as being in the employ of the government that continue to oppress the Muslim people. The tirade against the local ulama lambastes them for their failure to deliver tangible social change in the realization of an *ummah* (community), thus the need for an Islamic khalifa.

Departing from traditionally moderate interpretations of Islam that is more the norm among Muslims in the Philippines, these radical ideas—floating on the internet and short wave radio broadcasts or carried by charismatic preachers and esteemed acquaintances—represent novelty that could be sufficient to pique more than passing interest. It seeks to override the aspiration for a Moro homeland by injecting the urgency for the Moro to unite instead with Muslims everywhere for a pan-Islamic state. Commonly, these notions are received piecemeal by the recruit, perhaps during Islamic seminars,⁵⁶ *halqa* (study circles), or in conversations about faith that take place in schools and madaris where ideas can be somewhat freely exchanged and authoritative explanations can be sought. It is during discussions such as these that someone ripe for radicalization can be identified through his receptivity to accept the extremist narrative.

Radicalization, recruitment, and the conversion process

These extremist messages are tailored for particular types of recruits to convince them of the legitimacy of these beliefs. The messages are twisted to sound logical in the light of the unjust social, political, and historical conditions the recruit finds himself, the Bangsamoro, and the global Muslim people in, and offer an alternative direction for his agency to resolve his personal, cultural, and spiritual crisis.

For college students and young professionals, radicalization is often undertaken during long intimate car rides or private visits where both the recruiter and the recruit are relatively assured of secrecy.⁵⁷ In Cotabato and Lanao, the recruit's initial contact with extremist elements is indicated to largely take place in schools, in mosques, or in other institutions for religious instruction.

In Basilan and Sulu, indoctrination happens during lectures given by leaders after communal prayer on those occasions when ASG bands find safe haven from pursuing troops. In the initial three months of the recruit's pagpangadji with the ASG, he is bombarded with lectures that rationalize the kidnappings and violence committed by the ASG as grounded in the true jihad, one that assures the actor a shortcut to *Jannah*.⁵⁸ Fed, armed, and welcomed into the ASG fold, the recruit is not likely to argue the interpretation and would be more inclined to agree with his hosts. With little economic prospects awaiting him elsewhere, the recruit soon adjusts to the ASG way of life which represents a vast improvement to his life conditions prior to his affiliation with the group.

In the mainland, extremist ideas can be injected during lectures after *Salat'ul Juma'ah* (Friday congregational prayer in mosques), attracting questions from the audience. Those who manifest their interest in these ideas can further be indoctrinated in the community itself when the recruiter can control the environment to deny the potential recruit access to contending views until he has come to accept the rightness of the cause and is ready to declare his *niyat* (intention) to offer oneself in service of Islam through jihad.⁵⁹

The recruit's conversion is finalized in his pledge of allegiance (*mubaya*)⁶⁰ to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, identified by Muslim extremists today as the rightful Muslim world leader. It has become a fad to capture the oath-taking on video for uploading on YouTube.⁶¹ On analysis, the debut on the digital platform acts as a coming of age ritual that confers on the recruit his new identity. This public declaration through social media raises his self-esteem and prestige as he perceives it to elevate his status to the global arena no less. The ISIS flag and logo displayed at this ceremony are status symbols that further identify his person to belong to a very select group. Thus, the very ceremony conveyed through the digital format responds to the recruit's psychological needs for disclosure, affirmation, and special affiliation⁶² that had otherwise been denied him prior to his involvement with the extremist group.

To further reinforce his continued adherence to the cause, he receives financial enticement—ranging from Php3,000 in Basilan to as high as

Php16,000 in Marawi. Channeled mainly through anonymous bank deposits, the monthly remittances serve to make the recruit realize his connection to something bigger than himself and his immediate affiliation;⁶³ the regularity of the deposits indicating assurance that there is a reliable mechanism at work for the continuity of the larger plan. The income represents achievement of financial independence, a developmental marker that signifies entry into adulthood and that he is now ready for more serious decision making and life commitment.

But according to a former ASG member, the ASG members do not receive monthly salaries. ASG earnings from KFR activities are used for operations, such as the purchase of firearms and communications equipment, food and subsistence. Only a portion of the KFR income is left to be divided among those who had directly participated in moving and keeping watch over the hostages.⁶⁴ This intermittent schedule of reinforcement is likely to strengthen the ASG member's behavior of participating for the success of kidnapping activities, as he can only be paid when the ransom demand has been met. This schedule of earning keeps the individual from straying from the group, as there is safety in numbers and he could at least remain fed when his money runs out.

Extremist groups also provide recruits with high-powered guns that, in the context especially of those in lawless areas, respond to the individual's need for personal security and confer upon the bearer a higher status in his society. In some places, these guns could further be used in lucrative income-generating activities like kidnapping, abduction and extortion. They could be parlayed for paying jobs like providing muscle for local politicians and warlords. They could also be readily exchanged for cash when needed.

Recruits undergo commando training in camps where foreign bomb instructors are rotated seemingly for their protection and as part of the cooperation among local extremist groups to share resources. Local trainers are reported to come from the Ghuraba group that previously trained under the MILF.⁶⁵ As there is no training camp in Cotabato,⁶⁶ DFIC recruits go to AKP training camps in Palimbang and Sarangani or in the Butig training

camp of the Maute Group. Recruits from various extremists groups are put in one batch, thus forging during training connections across geographically dispersed extremist groups.

The ASG, on the other hand, has the capability to conduct its own training in its mountain lairs, sometimes with the support of foreign terrorist personalities. New recruits are almost immediately given guns, conveying that early the rightness of bearing arms for the cause. During their training, a situation may arise when the ASG figures in violent encounters with pursuing government troops. In these instances, the trainees are deployed in the effort to resist.⁶⁷ This does not require much enticement as recruits are already primed to come to the aid of blood relatives and their Muslim brothers who are besieged by non-Muslims.

Military instruction emphasizes training on bomb-making,⁶⁸ usually handled by Indonesian or Malaysian instructors.⁶⁹ It also incorporates frequent collective prayer⁷⁰ and Islamic discussions. Thus, there is little opportunity for the individual recruit to be alone in the training camp, requiring him to regulate his behaviors and words to be in harmony with the company, thereby amplifying the effect of the social contagion. These normative procedures push the individual to adhere more closely to group behavior, attitudes and ideas.

In the mainland, commando training usually runs for forty days, but can stretch to three months.⁷¹ Some stay on in the training camps even after their training had ended.⁷² The training schedule in Butig appears to be loose as some trainees can travel back and forth during the training period to attend their classes or maintain presence among family so as to avert suspicion.⁷³ Or, the training can be interrupted when there is a need to provide support to embattled allies that come under attack by government troops such as when in February 2016, a post on the Facebook page *Komentaryo Ummah* called for *haya alal jihad* (call to jihad), inviting all able-bodied Muslim to come and fight against the impending attack of the government forces on the Maute Group in Butig.⁷⁴

At the end of the military training, the graduates are obliged to participate in jihad—that is, to wage war against the oppressors of Islam.

Given the extremist indoctrination, the target of such jihad could be anybody who does not subscribe to their brand of *aqeeda* (ideology), whether Muslim or not. The most likely targets are the government troops. Lately, however, especially after the January 2016 beheadings in the Butig sawmill, the residents feel that they too could be targeted. Muslim mothers expressed their fears of their community being targeted by violent extremists should they be considered kaffur for their wish to keep their children from associating with the extremist groups.⁷⁵ Local ulama who preach against extremist ideas similarly feel threatened.⁷⁶

Participation in the violent act seals the recruit's bond with the extremist group. As the act makes him a target of law enforcers, he needs the protection of the group. In Lanao, some parents who claim their children had joined the Maute Group understand that their children cannot readily and cleanly leave the group under threat of harm by their cohorts.⁷⁷ To a certain extent, the resulting paranoia has limited the recruitment in communities as families caution their children to avoid extremist influence.

Discussions

Distorting the Bangsamoro aspiration

The Bangsamoro narrative has since its inception been about uniting the Filipino Muslims in Mindanao. Mindanao's inclusion in the imagined caliphate had never been part of the Bangsamoro narrative until recently. While the MNLF had been known to send fighters to Afghanistan in 1989, it did so to help defend the Afghan Muslims against Soviet invasion. The notion of the national boundaries separating the Muslims of the world was central to this instance of international exchange.

And while the argument for the Sultanates of Maguindanao, Marawi, and Sulu predating the 1898 Treaty of Paris that delineated the territory of the Philippine Islands had figured in the Bangsamoro consciousness now and again, the idea of extending Bangsamoro geographical boundary to make it part of the pan-Islamic caliphate espoused by the Al Qaeda, JI, and ISIS is not familiar

to many Filipino Muslims. Only perhaps when such international extremist organizations demonstrate the capability to wrest Mindanao or any part of it for the Muslims would the idea become conceivable for the Bangsamoro.

Islam came to Mindanao through Arab traders that, by the nature of their business, were far from being xenophobic fundamentalists. Centuries later, Islamic followers in Mindanao still do not have a problem relating with non-Islamized people. The trouble in Mindanao began with the injustice of Muslim dispossession, government neglect, and the violence unleashed upon their communities. So while the themes of the Filipino Muslims' dispossession and coming under violent attack may resonate with the global Muslim's historical experience, the moderate attitude is ingrained in the Filipino Muslim psyche. Having experienced the tragedies of armed conflict happening in their communities, most of them are more concerned about peace in their home communities and are at the moment primed to await President Duterte's political resolution to the historical injustice suffered by the Moro people.

However, the creeping influence of extremism during the current lull in the Bangsamoro peace process is a growing concern in the grassroots. With much anticipation brought by the positive developments toward the end of the Aquino Administration, expectations have to be recalibrated under the new administration. This delay is making people lose trust in the government and in the MILF, which makes it harder to dissuade the disgruntled from taking rash actions. Some may resort to violent extremism as a way of relieving frustration and pushing for action. Some may reject the idea of meaningful autonomy and find the prospect of a pan-Islamic state more desirable.

Efforts at countering violent extremism narratives

In Lanao del Norte, the prestigious ulama including some coming from the MILF came up with a declaration condemning the ideology espoused by the Maute Group, but as it failed to get the MILF endorsement, the declaration had limited publication.⁷⁸ The ulama have no recourse but

to retreat to using the *masaajid* (places of worship) as their platform in rejecting the extremist ideology during lectures and sermons.⁷⁹

Counternarratives are also provided by civilians who engage the extremist mouthpieces in debates over two-way radio channels in Lanao.⁸⁰ In Basilan and Sulu, community reports have it that the MILF, MNLF, and the more moderate ulama actively target the vulnerable youth in their advocacy against the spread of extremism. In like manner, the government has deployed its “Salaam police” also for saturation drives in the communities.⁸¹ Some schools have reportedly released guidelines on the use of their facilities and to guide the conduct of student activities after noticing that these are used to disseminate the extremist agenda.

These disparate efforts may not be enough to stem the recruitment to violent extremism. More alarmingly, the opinion in Basilan and Sulu is that a resolution of the Bangsamoro peace process would not halt the economically motivated kidnapping activities of the ASG,⁸² predicting that violence and bloodshed will continue even when the expanded BBL is passed. Similarly, the spread of IED-making capability to the KIM, DFIC, BIFF and the Maute Group bodes ill for community security prospects.

The seduction of the ISIS

The ISIS came to international notoriety in 2014 just as it was becoming apparent that the Aquino Administration was having difficulty in implementing the CAB. Digital technology provided the ISIS the platform for real-time worldwide communication. It initially attracted the radical youth who had been using the internet to maintain contact with other extremist groups such as the JI.⁸³ The interactive digital platform provided a safe venue for exhibitionistic public display where the groups ISIS attracted could be assured of a global audience. Except for the DFIC,⁸⁴ these groups had been in existence before 2014 and had been known to hew to the extremist ideology. There is reason to believe that various new formations that sprouted to pledge allegiance to ISIS and al-Baghdadi via the internet were created in name only by a few technologically savvy personalities.

By declaring Hapilon emir in Southeast Asia, it appears that the ISIS was more appreciative of the actual number of fighters that the ASG can command rather than the adulation showered on it by the self-proclaimed Black Flag Movement, the KIM, and other groups on the internet. As Hapilon is more a warrior than a cleric, it appears that the ISIS values military advantage over the ability to win converts through religious indoctrination. Recent developments, as ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, point to ISIS's focus on Southeast Asia, with Indonesian and Malaysian extremists converging in the Philippines through Sabah (Ressa 2017).

In actual number, the ISIS-inspired recruitment in the Philippines appears not to have reached a critical mass anywhere, but it had expanded the IED-making capacity of extremist groups. It is imperative for the government to deploy renewed vigilance on regulating access to bomb-making materials to include the use of ordnance that have the potential to become duds, enhance border security and cybersecurity, and improve human intelligence resources in the affected areas.

With the recent rout suffered by the ISIS in Mosul (Iraq), it would be some time before it can give particular attention to developments in the Philippines. It is more likely that some ISIS members from Syria may come to the Philippines to lie low and regroup.⁸⁵ It is therefore more imperative than ever that, among others, the Bureau of Immigration resolves its manpower problems (Sauler 2017). Along with the Indonesians and Malaysians that are converging in Mindanao,⁸⁶ the foreign extremists will strengthen the recruitment and lethal capabilities of Muslim extremists in the country.

Aside from denying propagators of the extremist agenda entry and access to potential recruits, the more immediate need is to strengthen the capability of local resources to provide convincing counternarratives to the extremist discourse and propagate the logic of moderate Islam in the modern world. As an exercise in persuasive communication, there is a need to carefully identify and rationalize the sender, the message, the medium, and the target receiver. A mechanism to assess the impact of the process through the feedback loop should also be put in place to identify ways to improve the content of the IEC material and the process of its propagation.

Meanwhile, political developments, such as the implementation of peace agreements with the MNLF and MILF, that contribute to strengthening the moderate view of Islam—that Muslims can coexist with and thrive among non-Islamized populations—should be realized soonest to prevent further frustration and disenchantment. The Islamic education of the Filipino Muslim youth must be prioritized and programmed to prevent it from being hijacked by extremist influences.

These groups target for recruitment the youth who are yet in the identity moratorium stage—that is, in the process of forming and committing to a personal identity. It would be safe to say that many among them are merely trying out the extremist identity for size. Thus, it would make sense to problematize the development of culturally-appropriate deradicalization programs that could bring them back to the mainstream.

Conclusions

The Bangsamoro peace prospects

While President Duterte enjoys community trust, the stalled Bangsamoro peace process appears to be a crucial element in providing the ripe environment for recruitment to extremism today. After the massive information campaign on the BBL toward the end of the Aquino Administration, the decision making on the fate of the Bangsamoro has seemingly turned exclusive again since Duterte assumed office in June 2016. This is dampening the anticipation of the optimistic and causing the onset of frustration and cynicism among the more impatient who feel shut out from the process. For both, the call to violent extremism is an option to get some action done.

Push factors to violent extremism

The underlying causes for adopting extremist views are summarized as follow: Poverty, unemployment, historical injustices, political and economic marginalization, and illiteracy;⁸⁷ frustration, anti-Muslim bias, the

community presence of radical Muslims, and the deliberate actions of deep penetrating agents;⁸⁸ experience of human rights violations and realization of historical injustices against the Muslims in Mindanao;⁸⁹ and presence of extremists in schools, family ties, disenchantment with MILF leadership, and displeasure over corrupt political leaders who use their government positions for personal gains.⁹⁰ These factors are mutually reinforcing and cross validating. Thus, extremist groups present the recruit opportunities for Islamic education, revenge against personal and historical injustice, as well as economic gains.

Pull factors to violent extremism

Pull factors are the emotional or spiritual appeal of radical groups. These are: The social prestige value of participating in daring acts—with the added incentive of these acts being immortalized on the Internet; the sense of taking part in the global jihad; belonging to a select group that inspires awe; and the satisfaction that comes from claiming personal power by outwitting authorities and inflicting damage on the dominant enemy. For mostly young recruits the adventure, high risk, and romantic appeal of rebellion are also an attractive proposition. Thus, extremist groups present an outlet for the expression of the glory-seeking impulse. Affiliation and participation in extremist activities assuage the individual's need for disclosure, affirmation, status, belongingness, and power.

Community support

What an observer may perceive to be acts in support of the extremist agenda could actually be a highly emotional matter of meeting one's social obligations on which rests the basis for family honor and *maratabat* (pride, as a construct that combines issues of status, identity, and history of clan).⁹¹ Islamic cultural values to provide succor to family and aid to another Muslim in need prove stronger than considerations for one's own safety sometimes. Even as parents and neighbors disagree with the reasoning and

motives of extremists, they could not deny them help when they show up in the community.

Extremism has infiltrated communities because its presence is largely tolerated. Only a few dare to raise a voice against the ideologues and their ideology due to fear of reprisal. The local populace generally remains silent in order to protect family members who had gone over to the other side because their life experience has taught them not to trust the state security forces.

There are no mechanisms in place to actively prevent recruitment at its early stages, save for disconnected efforts represented by parental admonitions and the advocacy of moderate ulama, MILF, MNLF, and government functionaries such as the Salaam police in Basilan and Sulu.

There are also no deterrent mechanisms exercised against extremist expressions and influence. While community members may counsel their relatives against associating with identified recruiters, the presence of the latter is not reported to government authorities. The idea of banishing errant family members is unthinkable for the Moro. The most that the community members could do is to seek the intervention of family heads, respected ulama, and other authoritative traditional leaders to convey their appeal for the extremists to realize that their mere presence puts the community in danger of military attack. This is a daunting task, as getting the extremists to accept that they need to go may be taken the wrong way and provoke violent reprisal instead. There indeed is reason for caution since recent events have shown these groups capable of harming even Muslims whom they declare as *kafirun* or *murtad* (one who renounced Islam) in a process called *takfiri*.

The benefits of alliance with international extremist groups and cooperation with other local violent extremist groups had been demonstrated in the experience of the ASG and other groups. So long as the arrangement remains mutually beneficial, this connection would likely be sustained. Note however that while foreign support may have hastened the emergence and growth of late of extremist groups in Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Lanao, developments point to these groups having learned to be self-sufficient and resilient in so short a time. They are not about to go away any time soon,

with or without foreign support. It is therefore important that systematic interventions to counter violent extremism be established.

Recruitment evidently happens in the home communities. Thus, it is suggested to involve civil society, academe, and local government in guarding against violent extremism by implementing parenting programs that educate on the need for closer parental supervision of the social media exposure of the youth. Families also need support in guiding the young to navigate their social environment so as to avoid and resist getting caught up in the recruitment methods used by extremist groups.⁹² Government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) can catalyze the strengthening of community bonds by opening up the dialogue space where community members can share experiences, recognize the common problem, learn from the collective wisdom, and become motivated to work together in setting up community mechanisms that keep the people safe.

The propagation of violent extremism narratives could be minimized—if not totally prevented—if mosques, schools, and other seminar venues are able to enforce very strict guidelines on the use of their facilities.⁹³

Since the extremists use a different and perhaps distorted, narrow, and very literal interpretation of jihad, the counter narratives provided by the ulama must be encouraged.⁹⁴ The ulama may initiate an educational program to carry these counter narratives through radio, in the madaris and secondary schools, through posters, and other publications that target the youth. Just as the PNP chief believes that the PNP gained higher trust ratings on account of the halo effect from a *telenovela*,⁹⁵ so too perhaps could the image of moderate Islam win popularity points, especially when portrayed by charismatic Muslim actors. In addition, the endorsement of the MNLF and the MILF of the moderate view could serve to convey their unequivocal position on the matter,⁹⁶ as such could significantly influence their members to find it safe to publicly echo the same position.

But the most crucial game changer to arrest the growing attraction of extremist groups is indicated to be for the Bangsamoro peace process to be resolved to the satisfaction of the Muslims in Mindanao. This would require

political decision makers to understand and dignify the Bangsamoro narrative. Only by doing so could the predominantly non-Muslim legislators be inspired to undertake decent acts of redressing historical injustice and championing the Bangsamoro's right to self-determination. The non-Muslim legislators who are in the majority have to buy into the quest for peace in Mindanao. It is proposed to improve the representation of the Bangsamoro in central government in order for the Bangsamoro narratives to be propagated⁹⁷ until such become a familiar aspect of the shared history of the Filipino people.

Notes

¹ See Al Jazeera and Agencies, 30 June 2014.

² See Agence France-Presse, 16 August 2014.

³ In August 2014, AFP Spokesperson Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala was quoted to say, "This is propaganda and we will not give these terrorists the satisfaction by commenting."

⁴ See Zambasul case study (October 2016 to March 2017). The author cannot provide more information on the case study including the case studies on Cotabato and Maguindanao, Lanao del Norte, and Lanao del Sur due to non-disclosure agreement between the author and her sources.

⁵ See Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.

⁶ Alternatively going by the name Harakatul Islamiyah (Islamic Movement) – see the video posted January 2016 when it declared allegiance to ISIS and named Isnilon Hapilon as its leader.

⁷ The AKP has recently renamed itself as Ansar Khalifah Sarangani/Philippines.

⁸ See http://implproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/impl_Philippines_Policy_Brief.pdf.

⁹ The Cotabato City and Maguindanao case study further enumerates five other self-proclaimed ISIS-affiliated groups that have at different times been known to operate, seek temporary refuge, or transit through Central Mindanao. These are: Jamal al-Tawhid Wal Jihad Philippines (JTJ), Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM), Suyufil Khilafa Fi Luzon (SKFL), and Ansar Dawlah Fi Filippin (ADFF).

¹⁰ See Stanford University, 20 July 2015.

¹¹ As part of its alliance with the US on the global war on terror (GWOT), the operation involved the presence in the Philippines of U.S. special operation forces (SOF) to advise Philippine commandos in fighting Islamic separatists in the southern islands. The relative success of OEF Philippines is observed to be in deterring the kidnapping of American nationals by Abu Sayyaf. The recent KFR targets of the ASG indicate their preference for German, Norwegian, Malaysian, and Indonesian nationals. Actually, I doubt this sentence is true; the two Canadians kidnapped were probably thought to be

Americans originally. Europeans are indeed more likely to pay; also Indonesia is low margin but high volume and fast turnover.

- ¹² See http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6967810/ns/world_news/t/terror-group-claims-blasts-philippines/#.WOJ6ZNKGPMw.
- ¹³ Commander Bravo was one of the three MILF commanders who figured in the MOA-AD debacle in 2008.
- ¹⁴ On 30 November 2016, the Duterte Administration extended the olive branch to Commander Bravo and the Maute Group. See Gallardo 2016. Three weeks later, Commander Bravo met with Presidential Adviser on Overseas Filipino Workers and Muslim Concerns Secretary Abdullah Mama-o to deny allegations that he had created his own government in Lanao del Sur and to clarify his support of the government's war on illegal drugs. See Romero 2016.
- ¹⁵ See MILF Special Investigative Commission (SIC) Report on the Mamasapano Incident, March 2015.
- ¹⁶ IPAC Report 33. 2016, October 25. See http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2016/10/IPAC_Report_33.pdf, p. 3.
- ¹⁷ Al-Zarqawi had pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2003 and established the Al Qaeda in Iraq, the forerunner of ISIS.
- ¹⁸ The term is derived from Prophet Mohammad's narration in Saluh Muslim number 145 where Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah said "Islam began as something Gharib (strange) and it will return to being Gharib, so blessed are the Ghuraba." See the Lanao del Norte case study.
- ¹⁹ Lanao del Sur case study.
- ²⁰ Local sources aver that the MILF trained the KIM in the past, but this arrangement stopped when the KIM revealed its extremist aim, especially after the beheading of sawmill workers in Butig. See Lanao del Norte case study.
- ²¹ The elder Maute worked with the Department of Public Works and Highways.
- ²² Lanao del Sur case study.
- ²³ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ²⁴ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ²⁵ A community informant said that the Maute Group member killed in the November 2013 attack of a military detachment in Madalum, Lanao del Sur was the son of the Ulama who once ran for an elective post in the province. Two Xavier University students respectively taking up law and medicine had recently been arrested for their links with the Maute Group. A university professor's son who had studied at the Al-Ma'arif Islamic Institute in Baguio is included in the wanted poster of Maute Group members that is circulated by the police. See Lanao del Sur case study.
- ²⁶ The Coco scam was a pyramiding investment scheme ran by Jacob "Coco" Rasuman in Lanao del Sur. It collapsed in August 2012 with a total of P1.3B unpaid in investor claims. See Santos 2012.
- ²⁷ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ²⁸ Community interviews in the Lanao provinces often bring up bitter memories of atrocities committed by soldiers against Moro civilians during Marcos' martial law.

- ²⁹ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ³⁰ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ³¹ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ³² Zambasul case study.
- ³³ Zambasul case study.
- ³⁴ Zambasul case study.
- ³⁵ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study; Lanao del Sur case study.
- ³⁶ Zambasul case study.
- ³⁷ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ³⁸ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ³⁹ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁴⁰ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁴¹ Zambasul case study.
- ⁴² Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁴³ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁴⁴ This information is consistent with observations in the grassroots that the ASG is not attracting college students and young professionals any more, with its new recruits largely coming from the ranks of school dropouts and unemployed labor. See Zambasul case study.
- ⁴⁵ Lanao del Sur case study.
- ⁴⁶ Lanao del Sur case study.
- ⁴⁷ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁴⁸ See <https://jamestown.org/program/understanding-the-origins-of-wahhabism-and-salafism/>.
- ⁴⁹ Zambasul case study.
- ⁵⁰ Zambasul case study.
- ⁵¹ Zambasul case study.
- ⁵² Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁵³ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁵⁴ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁵⁵ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁵⁶ Islamic seminars provide the platform for radicalized Ulama and self-proclaimed scholars to preach the extremist view and cause an impromptu oath-taking among his audience, such as what appears to have been accomplished by former MILF member Jammil Yahya at the Masjid Islamic Center in Marawi City on 19 September 2014. See <http://www.manilatimes.net/military-investigates-oath-taking-marawi-city/128633/>.
- ⁵⁷ Lanao del Sur case study.
- ⁵⁸ Zambasul case study.
- ⁵⁹ The *Niyat* is a sacred oath that makes all deeds proceeding from it acceptable in the eyes of Allah.
- ⁶⁰ The *Mubaya* is mentioned in all the case studies. According to a community source, the *Mubaya* can either be directly offered to the *caliph* (civil and religious leader) of Muslim *Ummah* (supra-national community with a shared history and territory) or to his recognized *emir* (chief) in the locality who shall then in turn convey the pledge to the *caliph*. See Lanao del Norte case study.

- ⁶¹ Digital technology has provided a way for the pledge to be carried real-time to al-Baghdadi and, in some instances, for al-Baghdadi himself to confirm and encourage the new recruits.
- ⁶² The digital medium is increasingly used by various social sectors to respond to these identity formation and assertion needs or to project a desired public image. In university functions or peace rallies, such as the 17 July 2014 solidarity rally for Gaza that was held in the Mindanao State University for example, anonymous *nigabis* may suddenly unfurl KIM and ISIS flags and take pictures and videos of the crowd against this backdrop. Later, the digital files would be released on social media with the spin of representing KIM to have a much broader base of followers than it may actually have. See Lanao del Sur case study.
- ⁶³ Community sources have varied explanations for the fund sources. Some say the money comes from Morocco and Malaysia. Others say these are locally sourced funds from family, businessmen sympathetic to the extremist cause, and money from drug lords that have sought refuge among the violent extremist groups. See Lanao del Sur case and the Cotabato and Maguindanao case studies.
- ⁶⁴ Zambasul case study.
- ⁶⁵ The MILF is said to have ceased providing training to the *Ghuraba* when the KIM came out in the open with its goal to establish an Islamic caliphate. The MILF command was reportedly disgusted with the KIM's demonstrated capacity for brutal atrocities in the beheading of the sawmill owners in Butig in January 2016. See Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁶⁶ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁶⁷ Zambasul case study.
- ⁶⁸ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁶⁹ Zambasul and Lanao del Norte case studies.
- ⁷⁰ Zambasul case study.
- ⁷¹ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁷² One such training in Butig culminated in graduation rites held in Iligan City, as mentioned in one of the Lanao del Norte FGDs.
- ⁷³ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁷⁴ Community sources said that TJ Macabalang traveled unarmed with four companions from Cotabato to Butig. They were wounded in an artillery bombardment. See Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁷⁵ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁷⁶ Lanao del Norte case study. See also Zambasul and Lanao del Sur case studies.
- ⁷⁷ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁷⁸ The MILF, however, quietly refused to allow the use of its letterhead for public dissemination of the document. See Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁷⁹ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁸⁰ Lanao del Norte case study.
- ⁸¹ Zambasul case study.
- ⁸² Zambasul case study.
- ⁸³ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.
- ⁸⁴ The DFIC may have been a spin-off cell from the AKP, the Maute Group, or the KIM in a bid to establish presence in Cotabato City. There was much confusion in identifying the

perpetrators of the Davao night market bombing, with security forces initially laying the blame on the more established groups.

⁸⁵ See <http://www.rappler.com/nation/166073-returning-isis-regroup-philippines>.

⁸⁶ The Katibah Al Muhajir or Battalion of Migrants in the Philippines, a group composed of Indonesian and Malaysian extremists, is reportedly working with Hapilon, according to the International Centre for Political Violence & Terrorism Research.

⁸⁷ Zambasul case study.

⁸⁸ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.

⁸⁹ Lanao del Norte case study.

⁹⁰ Lanao del Sur case study.

⁹¹ Lanao del Norte case study.

⁹² Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.

⁹³ Lanao del Sur case study.

⁹⁴ Lanao del Sur case study.

⁹⁵ See <http://www.rappler.com/entertainment/news/140496-ronald-bato-dela-rosa-coco-martin-ang-probinsyano>.

⁹⁶ Lanao del Sur case study.

⁹⁷ Cotabato and Maguindanao case study.

References

Agence France-Presse. 16 August 2014. BIFF, Abu Sayyaf pledge allegiance to Islamic State jihadists. Accessed 21 March 2017, from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/375074/biff-abu-sayyaf-pledge-allegiance-to-islamic-state-jihadists/story>.

Agence France-Presse. 4 April 2017. Returning ISIS fighters to regroup in Philippines – experts. Accessed 5 April 2017, from <http://www.rappler.com/nation/166073-returning-isis-regroup-philippines>.

Alipala, Julie. 12 April 2017. Death of Abu Rami is sort of bad news for some Sulu folk. Accessed April 12, 2017, from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/888787/death-of-abu-rami-is-sort-of-bad-news-for-some-sulu-folk#ixzz4e2Dktrkp>.

Al Jazeera and Agencies. 30 June 2014. Sunni rebels declare new 'Islamic caliphate'. Accessed 22 March 2017, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isl-declares-new-islamic-caliphate-201462917326669749.html>.

Canoy, Jeff. 5 January 2017. Leader of pro-ISIS group killed in Sarangani. Accessed 16 March 2017, from <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/05/17/leader-of-pro-isis-group-killed-in-sarangani>.

Dizon, Nikko. 17 November 2012. Indonesian terror suspect dies in clash. Accessed 18 March 2017, from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/312195/indonesian-terror-suspect-dies-in-clash>.

Fernandez, Edwin. 24 July 2016. BIFF leaders ousted by moderate Islamic clerics – Muslim preacher. Accessed 25 March 2017, from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/798712/biff-leaders-ousted-by-moderate-islamic-clerics-muslim-preacher>.

- Gallardo, Froilan. 30 November 2016. Duterte offers peace to Maute group, Commander Bravo. Accessed 24 March 2017, from <http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2016/11/duterte-offers-peace-to-maute-group-commander-bravo/>.
- Impl. project. April 2016. Preventing Violent Extremism: Mindanao, Philippines. Accessed 16 March 2017, from http://implproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/impl_Philippines_Policy_Brief.pdf.
- Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict. 25 October 2016. IPAC Report No. 33: Pro-ISIS groups in Mindanao and their links to Indonesia and Malaysia. Accessed 7 March 2017, from http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2016/10/IPAC_Report_33.pdf.
- Merez, Arianne. 29 November 2016. How the Maute group recaptured Butig. Accessed 23 March 2017, from <http://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/11/28/16/how-the-maute-group-recaptured-butig>.
- MILF Special Investigative Commission (SIC). March 2015. Report on the Mamasapano Incident.
- NBCnews.com. 14 February 2005. Accessed 24 February 2017, from http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6967810/ns/world_news-t/terror-group-claims-blasts-philipp-ines/#.WOJ6ZNKGPmw.
- Rappler.com. 22 July 2016. PNP chief Dela Rosa, Coco Martin meet, discuss 'Ang Probinsyano'. Accessed 02 May 2017, from <http://www.rappler.com/entertainment/news/140496-ronald-bato-dela-rosa-coco-martin-ang-probinsyano>.
- Ressa, Maria A. 27 January 2017. Filipino millennial joins ISIS in Syria. Accessed 30 March 2017, from <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/159609-millennial-terrorism-isis-philippines>.
- Rodil, BR. 2003. *A story of Mindanao and Sulu in question and answer*. Davao City: MinCODE.
- Romero, Alexis. 18 December 2016. Commander Bravo denies creating own gov't in Lanao del Sur. Accessed 24 March 2017, from <http://www.philstar.com/nation/2016/12/18/1654651/commander-bravo-denies-creating-own-govt-lanao-del-sur>.
- Santiago, Alvin. 8 November 2016. Captured: Four more Davao bombers falls in Cotabato City. Accessed 8 March 2017, from <http://dwdd.com.ph/2016/11/08/captured-four-more-davao-bombers-falls-in-cotabato-city/>.
- Santos, Matikas. 27 November 2012. Rasuman pyramid scam brains arrested. Accessed 24 March 2017, from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/314051/rasuman-pyramid-scam-brains-arrested>.
- Sauler, Erika. 4 April 2017. Mass resignations, leaves plague immigration bureau. Accessed 04 April 2017, from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/886221/mass-resignations-leaves-plague-immigration-bureau>.
- Stanford University. 20 2015 July. Mapping militant organizations: Abu Sayyaf group. Accessed 16 March 2017, from <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/152>.
- The Manila Times. 22 September 2014. Military investigates IS oath-taking in Marawi City. Accessed 26 March 2016, from <http://www.manilatimes.net/military-investigates-oath-taking-marawi-city/128633/>.
- Unson(a), John. 28 August 2016. 8 Maute militants bolt Lanao del Sur jail. Accessed 5 April 2017, from <http://www.philstar.com/nation/2016/08/28/1618082/8-maute-militants-bolt-lanao-del-sur-jail>.

Unson(*b*), John. 9 October 2016. Davao blast suspect had suspicious visitors, neighbors say.” Accessed 10 March 2017, from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/10/09/1631873/davao-blast-suspect-had-suspicious-visitors-neighbors-say>.

Zambrano, Chiara. 27 January 2017. Top terrorist leader Isnilon Hapilon injured in military offensive in Lanao. Accessed 17 March 2017, from <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/27/17/top-terrorist-leader-isnilon-hapilon-injured-in-military-offensive-in-lanao>.