The Intimate Insurgency

Women's Maneuvering of the Bangsamoro Conflict in the Philippines

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BY
SIF LEHMAN JENSEN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2021

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

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(Image by Abdellah Ihadian)

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INTRODUCTION: WOMEN'S INTIMATE LIVES OF CONFLICT

"We felt the political oppression. There were killings, massacres actually. This was the most convincing argument for joining the Bangsamoro struggle". Hana sits in front of me in a small meeting room hidden behind a restaurant. It is my first time in this part of Mindanao, a stronghold of the separatist movement, and it has taken weeks of texting back and forth to set up the meeting. Hana agreed after a friend of mine from Manila, the daughter of Hana's close comrades in the separatist movement, vouched for me. Avidly, Hana starts to recount her life trajectory as part of the political struggle that started when she was a schoolgirl. It is a story of conflict and war that is intimately woven with family life, marriage, parenthood and widowhood. Talking about her own family as much as about all the men, women, and children involved in the struggle in the Muslim south, Hana states, "We have to get involved. This is our life."

I met Hana when I first came to the Philippines and started my research on women and armed conflict in 2014. I came with certain presumptions about how both women and armed conflict would look. Trained in international relations, yet with a strong inclination towards anthropology, I thought of armed conflict in military terms, as warfare and hostility between states, organized political actors and the like. Hence, I was particularly interested in the stories of women who, like Hana, were at the forefront of an armed insurgency and occupied roles as combatants. Women fighters, whom I expected to embody a particular kind of potent and assertive political agency; women who the war scholarship continuously overlooks. However, instead of telling stories about war and their political roles as fighters, the women told stories about their lives. "This is our life", as Hana summarizes, is the starting point of this inquiry: What does it mean for women to live with a violent political conflict?

This question implies a recalibration. Firstly, it invites us to explore conflict beyond its most spectacular and militarized forms that dominate mainstream international relations scholarship (Parashar 2013). How can we instead conceive of violent political conflict as a backdrop against which life is lived, as a structural dimension that shapes the everyday, which in certain moments and settings may be armed. Secondly, it calls into question the divide between the political and the private, which feminist scholars have sought to bridge for decades (Zarkov 2018). This divide underwrites how conflict tends to be treated as unfolding dramatically within a political sphere that is somewhat detached and separate from the social, personal and intimate dimensions of people's lives. Exploring violent political

conflict as lived experience of women, this study departs from the notion that the political is intimate. I home in on the ways in which it folds into and intertwines with women's social relationships, marriage, family and domestic lives. How do the entanglements of the Bangsamoro conflict and the women's everyday and intimate lives animate their commitments, desires, aspirations and opportunities? How can we conceive of women's agency and self-making as nested in but also as negotiations of the weavings of the political and the intimate in settings marked by conflict? I locate this inquiry within the Philippine context with an exploration of the long-lasting separatist conflict between Muslim insurgency groups and the Philippine state, and ask: How do Muslim women maneuver the intimate entanglements of violent political conflict, insurgency and kinship in the Philippines?

The study's empirical foundation is made up of 15 months of fieldwork in between 2014 and 2018 in three regions of the Philippines, where I engaged with different groups of women. Although my interlocutors resided in different locations, some in majority-Christian areas in Manila and Palawan and others in majority-Muslim communities in Mindanao, and identified with different Muslim ethnic-linguistic groups, they shared a history and living circumstances shaped by the separatist narrative and conflict.

The Muslim struggle for self-determination and an independent state, called *Bangsamoro,*[1] traces a long history of colonialism and Muslim resistance against colonial power (Curaming 2016; Majul 1999; Tuminez 2007). The contemporary evolvement of the conflict emerged in the late 1960s, and as exemplified in Hana's statement above, tends to be ascribed to the numerous massacres that the Philippine state was responsible for in the Muslim territories in Mindanao after the country gained independence in 1946 (Tan 2010). At the same time, in the broader Philippine context, land reforms and resettlement programs of Christians from the Visayas and Luzon regions to Muslim areas in the south produced sectarian violence in Mindanao, while armed peasant and communist rebellions and student protests took place throughout the country (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). This culminated in the declaration of martial law by then president Ferdinand Marcos in 1972, the same year as Nur Misuari, a Muslim intellectual, formulated a political call for Muslim independence and created the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1972 that went into war with the Philippine state (Noble 1976). Over the last five decades, the conflict landscape has been characterized by armed conflict interspersed with a number of cease fires and peace negotiations, while other Muslim insurgencies have emerged and engaged the Philippine military.

[1] "Bangsa" is Malay for nation. "Moro" was originally a term used for the Muslim population in particular in southern Philippines during Spanish colonial rule. With the emergence of the Muslim separatist movement, the notion "Bangsamoro" emerged as a shared national identity across the different Muslim ethnic groups in the country (Jubair 1999).

Against this backdrop, this study is concerned with the inside of the conflict for women. During my conversations with women who, like Hana, had lived most of their lives amidst the separatist conflict and had participated in the armed resistance against the state, kinship, clan and family relations surfaced as what tied them to the struggle. They would explain how it was a collective familial decision, though led by male family members, that their clan would support and enter the separatist movement. In the first place, women followed male relatives to join the struggle, as the women would say, as way of protection and survival. Most of the women had also married within the movement. At the same time, growing up while the conflict was brewing, the militarization of their communities intensified, culminating with the war after the MNLF was formed; this, they explained, triggered their ideological commitment to the struggle.

The women's stories bear resemblance to how politics, kinship and families merge in the Philippine context. Politics at local as well as at national level is predominantly organized around families (Abinales 2000; Lara 2014; McCoy 1994). Mina Roces takes a gendered approach to kinship politics and explores how women in post-independence Philippines have seized unofficial power through their familial bonds to men in power (Roces 1998, 2000). Analyzing the historical traces, Roces argues that kinship politics is embedded in traditional social values that place loyalty to the family and its interests at the heart of official politics (ibid.). On this basis, I ask how insurgency politics and kinship politics are mutually embedded and shape relational and gendered norms, values and commitments for women. In what ways is the conflict nested in the intimate lives of women and how does it undergird their agency?

As I started to engage with Muslim communities beyond Mindanao, a more nuanced picture emerged of the conflict and how it is lived by women. Not everyone had been actively involved in the Bangsamoro struggle. Women had left Mindanao to pursue livelihood opportunities, send their kids to school, live a "peaceful life"; things that many of my interlocutors considered unattainable in Mindanao. Some had left Mindanao because of the hazards of war and generally high levels of militarization and violence, as de facto internally displaced. It also became clear that political mobilization around Muslim nationhood and the separatist claim did not resonate in the women's contexts in Manila and Palawan. Yet, the conflict reached into these settings and determined their political, social and economic realities in the everyday.

Muslims have settled and built communities in other provinces in the country for generations (Eder 2010; Watanabe 2007). In fact, Muslim communities existed and Muslims were among the ruling families in what became Manila in the Luzon region and in the central parts of Visayas prior to Spanish colonization in the beginning of the sixteenth century (Abubakar 2005; Majul 1999). Limited research, if any, is to be found about the corollaries of the separatist conflict beyond Mindanao and how it impacts the lives of Muslims living in other parts of the Philippines beyond Mindanao. On this basis, I broaden out the empirical scope to Muslim migrant communities in majority society predominantly consisting of the

Catholic, Tagalog population in Manila and Palawan. This allows for an analysis of how the armed conflict is reconfigured into other forms of violence that mark the lives of Muslim women and their families in these contexts. As the conflict travels along with Muslims leaving Mindanao, and transforms into exclusion, hostility and marginalization, I ask how violent political conflict is structurally embedded in the women's everyday realities and shapes their maneuvering and struggles to survive.

Analytically, I approach the separatist conflict as manifest in the political, social, economic and gendered conditions of the Muslim Filipino population. Drawing on feminist and anthropological scholarship, I conceptualize the conflict as relational, an intimate object animated by notions of national identity, belonging and attachments (Amarasuriya et al. 2020). While the conflict has moved in waves and during certain periods of time evolved into war and critical events (Das 1995), it is enmeshed in a collective history of continued colonial oppression, and is a chronic aspect of the ordinary and everyday lives of Muslims (Das 2007). Overall, I understand the conflict as a structuring force that is always at work in the lived experience of Muslims. These outlooks course through the study, as the backdrop against which the women's everyday maneuvers are set.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is a study of violent political conflict, insurgency and women in the Philippines. I explore the ways in which the Muslim separatist conflict is intimately anchored in women's lives shaping social norms, obligations and women's possibilities for action. Thus, I argue that we cannot grasp the modalities and depth of this conflict if we conceive of it only as the extraordinary and spectacular events of war that have played out between military forces and armed insurgency groups in Mindanao over the past six decades. The conflict is inherited and institutionalized through a narrative of Muslim nationhood and homeland and a history of colonization. It is embedded in the violent structures that Muslims live with across the Philippines and entangled with patriarchal family and kinship structures. I conceptualize the conflict as mutable and existing within a continuum of violence (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes; Kublitz 2015), which takes different but always intimate forms in the ways it animates the women's social, political and economic realities in particular ways in each of the three locations of Mindanao, Palawan and Manila. It is my hope to bring forth how women's capacities for action reflect contradicting aspirations, and learning and fulfilling social, political and gendered obligations and norms (Mahmood 2001, 2005). I aim to show the work the women put into trying to survive and make a life against the pressures of violence, impoverishment and marginalization that are tied to the conflict. "Intimate insurgency", as this dissertation is titled, does not only refer to the armed rebellion against the Philippine state, in which some of the women in this study are involved. Insurgency refers to the creative, contradictory, subtle and fragile

ways in which the women in this study deal with and negotiate the violent and patriarchal forces that conflict and family life produce in their insistence on crafting a life, sociality and selves. This form of insurgency, the women's maneuvers and agency, is intimately nested in familial relationality, in the relationships among women, in their everyday struggles for survival and becoming as women and as selves.

The dissertation consists of a summary report and three articles that make up the analyses of the study. The summary report is comprised of four chapters that present the overall empirical, methodological, conceptual and theoretical framework and serves to set the scene for the articles that figure as chapters five, six and seven, followed by a concluding chapter that sums up and discusses the research findings.

Following the presentation of the research inquiry and questions that open this introductory chapter, the next section introduces the empirical field. What I aim to convey here is the way in which the process of collecting data for this study has been influenced by the processes of the conflict in the Philippines. In particular, two major events in Mindanao, as the place I initially considered my field, required me to rethink both the field and my analytical approach to armed conflict. By broadening my empirical field to other Muslim contexts, I was enabled to conceive of the conflict as not only the spectacular warlike confrontations between the military and Muslim separatists in Mindanao, but also its workings at a structural level as violence, exclusion and marginalization of ordinary Muslims in Christian majority contexts.

Chapter two situates the study within the field of feminist international relations, namely more recent critical war scholarship (Baaz and Stern 2013; Wibben 2016; Parashar 2013; Sylvester 2011, 2015), to which it seeks to contribute new knowledge. In what ways does the concept of intimacy allow us to advance the analysis of conflict and women? What does it mean to live intimately with a violent, political conflict like the separatist conflict in the Philippines? If we collapse the often-posited binary between the political and conflict, and the personal and intimate spheres of life, which experiences and realities of women are we then able make visible in our analyses? How does a complex picture of their agency emerge? Drawing on feminist and anthropological scholarship, I elaborate on my analytical approaches to understanding the entanglements of conflict, gender and intimacy. The ways in which political struggle, notions of nationhood, kinship and familial structures entwine as two overarching structuring forces in the women's lives are conceptualized through perspectives on patriarchal relationality, marriage and selfhood. Then, I discuss my analytical perspectives on women's maneuvering that are seen as composite, contradictory and creative everyday enactments of agency. Centering on attempts and aspirations to fulfill social, moral and political commitments and obligations, and ideals of womanhood, the women's agency is also the work they do to survive, make selves and live with the pressures of conflict, violence and kinship politics.

How I have conducted the research is the focus of chapter three. Using a feminist methodology, I have followed the conflict into the intimate, everyday spheres of the women's lives during the three fieldworks that constitute the empirical basis of the study. The chapter describes my interlocutors' contexts in the three different field sites, the nature of the fieldworks and my encounters with the women as well as the methods used in the collection of data. Although I seek to integrate some ethical perspectives along the way, the chapter ends with a more substantial discussion on ethics, positionality and expectations arising from how my relationships with the women evolved during the fieldwork and the way I make them known in this study.

Chapter four provides a contextual backdrop of the separatist conflict. Taking its departure in how the separatist conflict has increasingly been interpreted through frames of violent extremism and jihadism, it seeks to draw the historical, colonial and contemporary political contours of conflict and the origins of the Bangsamoro narrative. By reviewing the extensive scholarship on the conflict, and the minimal literature on women, my main objective here is to address some tendencies in the literature. The first is a kind of exceptionalism through which Mindanao appears as being the only place of conflict and the separatist conflict as elevated to the overarching national threat. I suggest that the separatist conflict and Mindanao can be conceived as an integral part of the larger political and conflict landscape in the country. Another tendency is the imperative of family in the study of Philippine politics. Yet families are treated as self-evident wholes, which we may suggest contributes to the disappearance of gender differences, and of women as such in the literature. The chapter argues that the recent portrayals of Mindanao and Muslim insurgency as transnational jihadism in which women suddenly become visible are just one of many through which Mindanao and Muslims are constructed, historically and in present times, as the main threat to but also a constitutive other to the Philippine nation-state.

In the three articles (see table below), I trace the configurations of the political conflict between the Philippine state and the Muslim insurgency into the contexts of Palawan, Manila and Mindanao. The order of the articles follows a movement from low to high intensity of conflict and from exploring intimate, everyday forms of agency to activist forms of the agency of women. The articles are in themselves accounts of the ways in which the context-specific manifestations of conflict mark the women's lives, familial relationships and maneuvering. Together they point to my overall argument of how women's possibilities for action are set in the way that violent, political conflict is intimately embedded, shaping conflicting social, relational and gendered commitments that women negotiate and fulfill in order to survive, make a life and contribute to the family and the Muslim nation.

The first article zooms in on the affective dimension of intimacy by asking what love comes to mean for women living with violence and marginality in a Muslim neighborhood in Palawan, in western Philippines. While the two following articles show how familial and intimate relationships animate the political

struggle for the women, in the context of Palawan the political conflict takes shape of exclusion and marginalization, which confines the women to the periphery of the labor market as well as the city – always in danger of being pushed out entirely. Based on my engagements with two Muslim communities during five months of fieldwork in 2018, I seek to unpack the empirical notion of learning to love that figured in some of the women's marriage stories, and what it may tell us about the women's possibilities of making a life and selves. The article argues that learning to love is anchored in patriarchal forms of relationality in the family, moral and religious teachings of womanhood that women cultivate and teach each other in the family and in the mosque, and social and economic survival.

The second article explores how the entanglements of insurgency and kinship relations are at work in the lives of Muslim migrant women who live on the fringes of Manila. Based on my second fieldwork in the prison context of Maharlika Village, the largest Muslim neighborhood in Manila, it asks why a group of women marry imprisoned rebels in the capital. Muslim insurgency, extended kinship networks and home and community of the women and their husbands are relationally tied together, producing attachment, and social and gendered obligations and norms, which the women seek to fulfill, allowing them a degree of independence and detachment in the everyday. On this basis, I propose the term "composite agency" to bring attention to the women's aims at fulfilling contradictory desires, notions of morality and obligations arising from the entanglements of insurgency and kinship politics, which allow them to attain own aspirations.

The third article asks how implications of intimacy animate women's involvement in armed conflict. Based on my encounters with women involved in the Bangsamoro struggle in Mindanao, it explores how the conflict and their political participation is caught in intimate relationships and familial obligations that shape their realities in multiple, ever-changing and contradictory ways. Insurgency is intimate through the way familial ties, growing up with and surviving war impel the women into the struggle. Meanwhile, the women's participation is also in tension with social, familial and gendered roles and pressures, and is circumscribed by critical political events, personal tragedies and familial decisions. I conceptualize the notion of an intimate politics of insurgency that brings forth the ways in which political struggle is interwoven with intimacy, constituting a conflict infrastructure that both makes and unmakes women's participation. Hence, I argue that the intimate politics of insurgency captures how the women reconcile their political involvement with life as a whole through constantly negotiating and maneuvering the boundaries between their political and personal lives.

Table 1

Article	Journals	Publication status
Article 1 Title: "Learning to love at the violent periphery of Philippine society"	Submitted to Journal of Feminist Anthropology	Accepted with minor revisions by Nov. 5, 2021.
Article 2 Title: "Philippine prison marriages: Kinship politics and women's composite agency"	Submitted to Conflict and Society Journal: Advances in Research	Published in vol. 6 (2020) doi:10.3167/arcs.2020.060102
Article 3 Title: "The intimate politics of insurgency"	Submitted to International Feminist Journal of Politics	In peer review

INTRODUCING THE FIELD

In contemporary armed conflicts globally since World War II, women have fought wars, participated as part of the auxiliary system, medics, couriers, mothers and wives, and partaken in intelligence and genocide and in reconciliation and peace processes (Coulter et al. 2008; Sankey 2018). In non-state armed groups around the globe, women have comprised as many as 30 percent of their members (ibid.). As my interest in gender and armed conflict took shape during my graduate studies, I was particularly intrigued by the question of what conflict was about for these women, who remained out of sight in most mainstream scholarship on global conflict. This brought me to the Philippines in 2014-2015 for an internship at a human rights NGO, Balay Rehabilitation Center, working with conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. As home to two of the longest current running insurgencies – the communist and the Muslim separatist – in the world, the Philippines provided a suitable case for studying women and conflict. During this stay, I was introduced to the specific case of women and the Muslim separatist conflict, which became the subject of my master's thesis, and subsequently grew into this study. Before presenting the theoretical and conceptual framing of this

research project, this section introduces the empirical field, the process of collecting data in different field sites, and how it informs my analytical approach to conflict.

Field research on violent conflict is a tricky endeavor for obvious reasons of security, ethics and access, which requires having gatekeepers but also what we may call an "ad hoc" approach of going along with what is possible under the given and often rapidly changing circumstances. The process of data collection bears resemblance to what Varma, Günel and Watanabe (2020) call patchwork ethnography. Such an approach, they argue, entails attention to how changing realities both in the field and in the life of the researcher impact the empirical foundation and production of knowledge. Patchwork ethnography is thus the innovative ways in which the researcher pieces together short-term field visits and fragmented material and finds new paths into the field, which open up for new insights (Varma, Günel and Watanabe 2020).

Two major political events have played a crucial role in determining the empirical field of this study. The first is the peace negotiations between the now dominant separatist organization, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine Government and the second is the so-called Marawi siege in 2017. Whereas the peace negotiations came with both the promises of a new autonomous Muslim region and high stakes of renewed war if they did not succeed, the Marawi siege introduced a new register of violence through which the conflict increasingly became reinterpreted as a global phenomenon of violent extremism.

In early 2015, the peace negotiations between the MILF and the Philippine government stalled as a result of an armed clash between a special operations group of the Philippine police and the MILF in Mamasapano, in central Mindanao. The military operation attacking the MILF camp was supposedly set to capture an alleged foreign terrorist hiding in the area. This sudden turn in the peace process and upsurge of violent confrontation epitomizes the unpredictability that people live with in contexts of armed conflict. At the time, I was staying in the neighboring town and the event put an immediate end to my fieldwork. The women I had come to know, who were actively involved in the struggle, were highly aware of how the promise of a peace deal was at best uncertain. Their experiences from previous peace negotiations were that it was only a matter of time before it would be replaced with another round of escalated military attacks and violence targeting Muslims in general, and members of the separatist movement in particular. This general sense of distrust and the experience that peace does not last was reflected in most of my encounters with MILF women. Lacking the legitimacy and assurance from a peace deal that would establish MILF as official power holders, and protect them from being attacked by the state, most of the MILF women could not risk speaking openly about their affiliation with the organization. On the other hand, the women who belonged to the other main separatist organization, the MNLF, looked into the uncertain prospects of renewed conflict, as a new peace agreement would replace the previous ones made between the government and the MNLF.

In a similar way, the destruction of Marawi city, the main Islamic city in Mindanao following the siege in May 2017, changed the topography of the conflict and once again unsettled the prospects of peace. Members of the locally anchored militant Maute group, which had declared allegiance to ISIS, went into Marawi allegedly to come to the rescue of the leader of Abu Sayyaf, another notorious militant group that up to this point had mostly operated in the southern parts of Mindanao, and the Basilan and Sulu provinces. After they had taken over several official buildings and made a jailbreak, President Duterte immediately declared martial law in the entire region of Mindanao, which again led to heightened militarization, instability and intensification of violence. A remarkable shift in how the conflict was perceived both locally in the Philippines and internationally also followed, through which Mindanao seriously entered the agenda of the global war on terror. I will return to some perspectives on these developments in the contextual chapter and for now focus on their methodological consequences.

These political developments resulted in a reconsideration of how and where to carry out the field research for this study. The women I had previously worked with who associated themselves with the struggle became silent, and martial law restricted travel to Mindanao. I therefore sought out alternative ways into the field. This led to a decision to conduct three rounds of fieldwork in Muslim communities in three different regions across the Philippines: in the capital, Manila, across Mindanao, and in Palawan. In this way, the empirical field was constituted by a combination of snowballing and, rather than patchwork, what I consider a kaleidoscopic lens on conflict: depending on the lights and the turning of the kaleidoscope, the object is reflected differently revealing its changing and repeating patterns. This analogy allows me to capture the inductive process of following the political conflict into different settings to make visible the continuities and different forms of conflict that shape the living circumstances and agency of Muslim women.

How these settings connect in ways that allow me to explore the lives and maneuvers of women against the backdrop of conflict requires some perspectives on what makes the field. In overall terms, tracing the patterns of conflict into a number of Philippine contexts constitutes a field that is made up of different sites. However, rather than conceiving the field sites as separate, I think of the field as composite and extending into various locations. Based on his work on transnational communities, Ghassan Hage suggests that fields can be conceived as stretching over multiple locations as a single "geographically non-contiguous space" (Hage 2005, 467). Drawing on this view, I consider the notion of community to be important to juxtapose the different sites. The women and the families in each of these settings originated from different places in Mindanao, most often did not know each other, and were characterized by class, ethnic and generational differences. The women in Manila and Palawan had also resided there for varying periods of time and were connected to the other Muslim residents in these places in varying degrees. Yet, their Muslim identity, a shared narrative of historical in-

justices and minoritization, and the dominant antagonistic discourse about Muslims in the Philippines have contributed to setting them apart from the majority Filipino society. In this way, we may consider how distance, borders and boundaries play into what we define as a field (Candea 2007; Hage 2005), which is constituted by Muslim communities and their excludable position within the Philippine nation-state. Candea proposes the term "arbitrary location" to think of field sites as "the actually existing instance, whose messiness, contingency, and lack of an overarching coherence or meaning serve as a 'control' for a broader abstract object of study" (Candea 2007, 180). In an afterword to his article, Candea elaborates on this notion, stating that, "arbitrary locations give one a vantage point from which to observe … the processes whereby wholes are made and unmade" (2009, 45). Drawing on these perspectives, I see the three locations as connected and at the same time as the situated instantiations of a changing and complex conflict context. Including these different settings where the conflict marks itself differently in women's lives, using the kaleidoscope as analogy, allows me to see the multifaceted and nuanced, and yet interconnected patterns of violence that the conflict produces. The rethinking of the field from originally centering on Mindanao to including other Muslim communities in the country also brought about a rethinking of the conflict. More so than the very visible forms of war, militarization, combat, material destruction and directly related deaths, I conceive of the conflict as a continuum of violence which ties in invisible forms of violence, as conceptualized by Bourgois and Schepher-Hughes (2004).

On this basis, besides the changing political backdrop over the course of the fieldworks, I consider two simultaneous movements to have composed the field, allowing for locality specific insights into how the separatist conflict is folded into lives of women in each of these settings. Firstly, there is a movement between what we might characterize as different intensities of conflict. Mindanao comes to represent a context of high intensity conflict where the separatist struggle is at the fore, and is thereby also a place characterized by political room to mobilize against the militarized and armed state violence, in which women are directly involved. In the Muslim communities in Manila and Palawan, the conflict is not militarized, but marks itself in subtle and structural ways instead of direct warfare. In these places, other expressions of state violence in the form of political exclusion, social and economic marginalization and ever-present precarity are manifest in the lives of Muslims. It also became apparent that there was no political room to push back or avoid state repression or to pursue a distinct national identity in these settings. Thus, while not being part of the areas at issue in relation to the separatist claim (although Palawan holds a contested place in the history of the separatist conflict), these contexts illustrate how the ordinary Muslim population is continuously denied a place in majority Filipino society, in which the conflict becomes an inherent element of the lives of Muslims. This brings me to the other movement structuring the field, which ensues from exploring women's insurgent pathways into the intimate sphere of the family, religious life and the everyday of

women, who may not take part in the political struggle, and yet live intimately with the conflict.

Taken together, the fieldworks allow for a number of insights into the complexity, range and shapes of conflict. These movements allow me to conceptualize the conflict not as geographically restricted to majority Muslim areas in the Mindanao and Sulu regions, but as a "moving object" that travels along with the Muslim Filipino population into the majority Philippine society and rests in the intimate, in gender dynamics and in women's preconditions and opportunities in the everyday. To conceive of the conflict as transmutable violence that impinges on the lives within Muslim communities beyond the conflict "center" in Mindanao, I draw on Anja Kublitz's (2011, 2015) ethnography on the "ongoing catastrophe". Kublitz points to how Al Nakba, meaning the catastrophe, which refers to the exodus of more than 700,000 Palestinians as a result of the 1948 war, is continuously evoked in the everyday of Palestinians living in Danish housing projects. This understanding of a catastrophe that continues, and is reconfigured from the spectacle of war into subtler forms of violence that nevertheless come to shape and restrict everyday life mirrors how I see the conflict and its different violent expressions across places in the Philippine context.

My data reveals how conflict itself, whether it is armed and characterized by extraordinary militarization and violence, or takes the shape of confining structural violence, becomes a condition of life, which the women maneuver in different ways. Having moved between places, geographically, but also from political to intimate spheres of life, the material serves to challenge assumptions of a political life as a certain public domain often thought of as distinct from realms of intimacy, social relationships and the private. As the articles will show, the women's participation in the insurgency, various forms of state violence and social, familial and intimate dimensions of life are entangled.

How these entanglements are conceptualized will be the subject of the next, theoretical chapter.

”Ground Zero” in Zamboanga a year after the fighting between the MNLF and the Philippine military in 2013.

2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: TOWARD UNDERSTANDING WOMEN AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

To come closer to an understanding of the ways in which armed, political conflict shapes women's lives, requires an analytical starting point that collapses the idea of conflict as belonging to a political domain that can be detached from the private, intimate and ordinary spheres of life. The three articles that follow capture how conflict and insurgency operate on the inside of the family, producing norms and obligations as well as identity, possibilities and desires for women. Yet, kin and family is also a structuring dimension that sets the framework for how life can be lived. I draw on feminist and anthropological scholarship that enable me to explore the women's maneuvering from a vantage point of the deeply entwined relationship between conflict, the political and the intimate.

This chapter outlines my theoretical and conceptual approaches. The first section presents the state of the art that situates this study within the field of feminist international relations. By fleshing out intimacy as an analytical lens, the aim of the project is to contribute to a nuancing of how we think of women's agency and of conflict itself. By taking a feminist, bottom up approach to the Bangsamoro conflict, my hope is also that this study will contribute to Philippine studies empirically by bringing forth women's lived experiences of the conflict and analytically by approaching the conflict as a structural feature that cannot be reduced to a "Mindanao problem".[2] In the subsequent section, I elaborate on the conceptual underpinnings of intimacy that allow me to conceive of the conflict as an intimate but also a structuring force. My approach to family and kinship as mutually embedded with conflict and equally a governing force follows, before the chapter ends with a theoretical discussion of how we may conceive of women's agency.

[2] The "Mindanao problem" is an expression widely used in scholarly, political and public debate to refer to the different colonial, historical and contemporary factors that are used to constitute Mindanao as a particular region of conflict, violence and crises. The Mindanao problem as a discourse is closely linked to the "Moro problem", a term introduced by the Spanish, explaining the failures of colonizing the Muslim territories under their colonial rule (Amoroso 2020)

COMPLICATING CONFLICT AND GENDER

I locate this study within an emerging critical war scholarship that moves away from traditional macro perspectives used by scholarship on international relations (IR) and explores the lived experiences and realities of armed conflict (Parashar 2013; Stern and Baaz 2013; Sylvester 2011, 2015; Wibben and Donahoe 2020). In her article, "What wars and war bodies know about international relations", Swati Parashar (2013) argues against the way "International Relations' theorizing of war steadfastly refuses to acknowledge people, experiences and emotions" (Parashar 2013, 617). Exploring the everyday within wars that do not have clear beginnings or ends, Parashar argues that people have an intimate relationship with war, learn to live with its effects, politics and institutionalization, and continue their ordinary lives within it (ibid.). Following Parashar's critique of mainstream international relations scholarship that conceives of war as a macro political phenomenon preoccupied with cause, costs and resolutions (ibid.), I contend that to understand violent political conflict we need to inquire into how it is lived by people on the inside. On this basis, I ask how women live intimately with conflict.

This study builds on feminist international relations scholarship that has extensively addressed gendered aspects of war over the past three decades. Confronting the absence of women and gender analysis in the traditional field of international relations (Enloe 1989; Tickner 1992), and its masculinized culture, language and logics (Cohn 1988), feminist scholars have made important contributions to make visible the diversity of women's political and social roles in conflict (Moser and Clark 2001; Zarkov 2018). Studies of the militarization of women's lives and political involvement as militants, combatants, activists, leaders and perpetrators of genocide and terror in a wide range of political contexts call out prevalent gendered stereotypes that regard women as domestic and apolitical, bearers of life and peace (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Jessee 2015; Hilsdon 1995; Ness 2007; Nordstrom 2005; Shekhawat 2015; Wibben 2016). By advocating for the inclusion of women into all areas of politics, these works have assisted an incipient gender mainstreaming of global politics, and real effects through continuously speaking back to global political agendas.[3] Women are political actors who must be taken seriously at the global political arena, in conflict and post-conflict contexts and interventions such as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programs and peacebuilding efforts (Coulter et al. 2008; Enloe, 2004, 2013). Drawing together various IR schools and feminist approaches, Laura Sjoberg formulates a feminist theory of war, arguing that "war is constituted by and constitutes gender and that gendering is a key cause of war, as well as a key impact" (Sjoberg 2013, 6).

[3] Perhaps most importantly at a global level, the 1325 resolution on Women, Peace and Security was adopted by the Security Council in 2000, which urges all UN member states to ensure women's inclusion in peace and security processes.

Entering into conversation with this scholarship, I propose that foregrounding intimacy allows for advancing how we think of women who live with conflict, whom we bring forward in our analyses, and of violent, political conflict itself. An often clear-cut distinction between women who are categorized as actively involved in conflict and hence (violent) political actors, and those who are seen as survivors, civilians and peace advocates reveals itself in the feminist IR scholarship. Working on so-called "violent women", Sjoberg and Gentry (2014, 2015) center their analysis on how the portrayals of women engaged in war draw from traditional narratives and stereotypes. Violent women, they argue, are conceived as an anomaly or failed femininity, in opposition to "the beautiful soul" trope that constitute women as pure, maternal and innocent, particularly in wars. However, women are also the cause of violent conflict as much as they are people who must be protected or fought for (ibid.). Sjoberg and Gentry show that while women involved in violent action for political ends fall outside dominant gender norms and roles, these fixed understandings serve to constitute women as an external category to armed conflict. However writing from a dichotomy between "traditional" gender tropes of innocent femininity and "violent women" may, I find, entail an inherent danger of reproducing gender stereotypes, upon which a divide between women engaged in violence and those who are external to conflict is established. In this way, we risk not only simplifying representations of women in conflict but there is also the danger that women whose experiences of conflict do not easily fit into such a category of active violent, political action remain invisible.

Beyond an argument about how women too are political actors, violent and involved in conflict, I am interested in the social and political conditions that are created by violent conflict, which animate but also restrict women's participation. I draw on a growing body of anthropological and feminist literature emphasizing the multifaceted and conflicting modes of agency and subjectivities of women in wars (Coulter 2008; Duzel 2018; Gowrinathan 2021; Utas 2005). Exploring the diaries of Kurdish women fighters, Esin Duzel (2018) demonstrates the dilemmas and fragility of asserting militant agency and moral subjectivity for women, which in "their patriarchal and militaristic context" comes to be caught between death and empowerment (Duzel 2018, 140). Similarly, in her cutting-edge book, Nimmi Gowrinathan (2021) calls into question the structural and confining forces that make women insurgents. Having engaged with women militants for two decades, she asserts that to understand women engaging in violence, there is a need "to reverse our view of the target, honing in on a violent state and the society it breeds" (Gowrinathan 2021, 3). Following these perspectives, this inquiry treats the political conflict as one structuring and oppressive dimension of the women's lives, which they maneuver and negotiate in the ways available to them. I want to suggest that as much as state violence may radicalize women into insurgency it also marginalizes and has determining effects on women's possibilities for making a life. Women act on conflict and are affected by it in numerous and profound ways (Sylvester 2011). Coupling intimacy to the analysis of conflict, I argue, allows for

an exploration of the lives and experiences of women, who are positioned in different ways in relation to conflict. This study reveals a complex picture in which the lines between political, social and civilian roles are not easily drawn. Thinking along Duzel's argument, dilemmas, ambivalence and fragility but also creativity and endurance animate the ways in which women maneuver these positions and subjectivities against patriarchal and conflict structures. On this basis, the aim of the study is to nuance how we think of women's capacities for action, possibilities and aspirations in conflict contexts.

Philippine studies also need feminist research to provide insights into the separatist conflict from below and from the perspective of women. In chapter four, I delve into the existing and rather limited scholarship on Muslim women in the context of conflict in Mindanao. I propose that the lack of attention to women as a category, and of gendered perspectives on the conflict stems from two coinciding tendencies in the literature. Analyses of the conflict and the troubled relationship between the Philippine state and the Muslim population are often done at a macro level, and writing on families in relation to politics in the Philippines deals with the family as a unit, and thereby erases gender differences and to a large extent a view of women in their own right. Additionally, I identify a gap in Philippine scholarship in terms of how the separatist conflict marks itself in other regions of the country beyond Mindanao. In fact, scholarly attention to Muslim communities in other parts of the country is minimal. This research aims to contribute to the regional scholarship in two ways; firstly, by bridging perspectives on gender and armed conflict through a lens on intimacy, and secondly, by exploring the modalities of the separatist conflict in a broader Philippine context.

INTIMATE LIFE OF CONFLICT

To explore what it means to live intimately with a decade-long armed, political conflict like the Bangsamoro conflict in the Philippines, I draw on anthropological scholarship that offers insights into the connections between conflict, the everyday and social and intimate relationships (Amarasuriya et al. 2020; Das 2007; Shah 2013).

I conceptualize intimacy as relational attachments that are characterized by notions of closeness, belonging, familiarity and confidentiality (Amarasuriya 2020; Berlant 1998; Oswin and Olund 2010; Stoler 2002). Intimacy is a political and governed sphere "in which we become who we are, the space in which the self emerges" (Oswin and Olund 2010, 60; see also Stoler 2002, 2006). Drawing on this definition, I conceive the intimate as conditioning and constituting one's own being in the world. As such, the intimate object and other subjects co-produce notions of identity, performativity and aspirations. Moreover, the boundaries between the self and intimate objects and others may not be easily demarcated, but are constantly disrupted and remade (ibid.). In this way, intimacy is the process and politics through which a person connects to the close exterior. Importantly,

while intimacy denotes relational attachment and belonging to human others, but also to abstractions like nation, religion and ideology, it does not provide warmth, safety, support and care by default. As Amarasuriya et al. (2020) note, intimacy can be confining and forceful, producing pressures, contestations and obligations. Similarly, "the closeness and belonging that intimacy affords (even when unwelcome) may operate at any distance, while isolation and estrangement may be very near" (Oswin and Olund 2010, 60). In analytical terms, these perspectives enable me to approach intimacy with conflict as socially and relationally embedded as well as an ordinary and chronic dimension of the women's lives.

Ethnographies on political conflict have shown how relations of intimacy are intrinsic to understanding the organization and dynamics of insurgency (Amarasuiya et al. 2020; Shah 2013). "The intimacy of insurgency", as Alpa Shah (2013) explores in her work on revolutionary mobilization, draws attention to how the expansion and decline of political struggle depends on the entangled social relationships between insurgents and the people living in the Maoist dominated areas. Shah argues that "relations of intimacy" develop through the movement's performances of ideological ideals that sidestep and contest traditional caste, kinship and class hierarchies (Shah 2013, 499). These relations are reinforced by the state's policies of domination and exploitation in these same areas, which have constituted the people living there as "other" (ibid.). Exploring the relationship between intimacy and dissent, Amarasuiya et al. (2020) argue that foregrounding intimate relations enables us to understand the attachments, commitments and constraints producing dissent. They assert that "Dissent is both enabled and contained by our intimate relations, and we can only understand the intensity of acts of dissent, and the risks they entail, if we also understand the intimate ties, tensions and contradictions within which they are enmeshed" (ibid., 4).

These perspectives provide a useful starting point to inquire into how women are intimately tied to the political conflict. Shah's insights show the ways in which intimacy with insurgency and its ideology emerges through an antagonistic relationship with the state, somewhat echoing Carl Schmitt's (1996) distinction between friend and enemy. Within this framework, political struggle against the state is animated by social relationships. This is a central insight for this study, in which familial ties compel women's involvement in the Bangsamoro struggle. Meanwhile, the women are intimate with the grand narrative of separatism that centers on Muslim nationhood and historical disenfranchisement. Intimacy thus extends to community that is constituted around religion, ideology, ethnic affiliation and notions of homeland in which notions of belonging are anchored. On this basis, I ask how armed, political struggle is entangled with social bonds of kinship, family and marriage producing a gendered politics, norms and expectations that women fulfill, negotiate and contest.

The embeddedness of insurgency and kinship politics shapes particular and contradicting gendered commitments for women. As Amarasuriya et al. argue, dissidents are "caught up in other, sometimes contradictory aspirations and rela-

tionships and forms of responsibility (Amarasuriya et al. 2020, 3). Intimate relations and obligations may also end women's political participation in insurgency. Moreover, for the women who are not actively involved in the conflict between Muslim separatists and the Philippine state, and who have moved away from the conflict setting in Mindanao, the conflict sticks to them in structural and symbolic ways, as I explore in the article on Palawan.

This brings me to the second perspective on how the armed, political conflict is known intimately for the women. Here, I return to Parashar's (2013) point about how people living inside wars have "an intimate, 'everyday' relationship with international relations" (Parashar 2013, 616). Beyond the usual imageries of extraordinary violence characterizing war studies, Parashar argues, as wars become protracted and institutionalized, they also become a way of life in which ordinary people are "willing and unwilling participants" (Parashar 2013, 618f). In her anthropological account on violence, Veena Das (2007) explores the relationship between "world-shattering violence" and the ordinary. Das argues that the violent event is folded into the everyday life of people and communities, who seek to remake the world "through descent into the ordinary" (ibid., 7).

Among Muslim Filipinos, the sudden violent clash between MILF and Philippine special forces and subsequently the Marawi war described in the above, are not only extraordinary events but also all-too-familiar aspects of life. While these political events had immediate and devastating effects on people's lives, they are also intrinsic to knowing the state as violent. This is also evident in the article on Palawan, which illustrates how the occasional fires in an informal Muslim neighborhood are experienced as collective, everyday forms of state violence. Building on Das's insights, I find that the relationship between the ordinary and the extraordinary or critical events of violence is not dichotomous (Das 1995). Rather, war is an extraordinary and simultaneously chronic condition of life that exists within a continuum of state violences (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004). Hence, I conceive of violence not as transgressing the boundaries of how the world is known. As lived, everyday experience and as an already collective and historical precondition, violence is *within* the boundaries of how the world is known, and part of the ordinary.

These perspectives allow me to approach the violent political conflict from a vantage point of the intimate, familiar and violent relationship with the state. Although the war-like situation in Mindanao is part of this reality, understanding conflict as intimacy with state violence broadens the scope to encompass forms of governance and politics that make a fertile ground for war. From this viewpoint, people's relationship with conflict cannot be reduced to either willing or unwilling participation but involves ambiguity, dilemmas and hindrances as much as it becomes a conditioning feature of how life can be lived. This begs the question, in what ways is conflict woven into the lived social, economic and political realities of women?

THE POLITICS OF KINSHIP AND PATRIARCHAL RELATIONALITY

The role of kinship as a core institution, not only socially, but also politically and economically, is well established and reiterated in Philippine studies (Aguilar 2013; Lara 2014; McCoy 1994; Roces 1998, 2000). The centrality of kinship, clans and family to politics is discussed in detail in the context chapter. Here, the aim is to provide a framework for understanding the forms of relationality, governance and selfhood that sediment in kinship and family structures.

Overall, kinship organization in the Philippines is bilateral, in which male and female lineage, at least in principle, are equally important (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). While cognatic kinship in itself proliferates the tracing of blood relations, which may include third and fourth degree cousins, it also encompasses fictive kinship through which people designate each other as relatives (ibid.). For example, among the Tausug, the ethnic-linguistic group to which some of my interlocutors belong, the primary kinship group is traditionally the *lahasiya,* which counts siblings, children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, spouse and in-laws. Each member of this group is mutually responsible for and expected to support the others (Jainal, Ruppert and Spoehr 1971). Writing about ethnic bonds among the Maranao, another ethnic-linguistic group of some of my interlocutors, Bentley (1987) notes that kinship idioms extend to members of the ethnic group because of "commonality of experience", which creates a "sense of being both familiar and familial to each other" (ibid., 33). Hence, the concept of family includes complex and wide-ranging ties across generations, between siblings and extended kin beyond the nuclear family, that each come with commitments and demands (Aguilar 2013; Bentley 1987; Cruz 2020; Jainal, Ruppert and Spoehr 1971).

These understandings allow me to grasp the way kinship and familial ties and idioms extend to community, ethnic group and even the separatist movement, drawing from a sense of commonality of experience and collective history, which bears resemblance to what Janet Carsten defines as cultures of relatedness (2000, 2004). Carsten asserts that kinship is essentially a cultural product, which is made and sustained through everyday practices and processes (Carsten 2000). Instead of merely defining what kinship is, Carsten encourages a focus on "what kinship does" (Carsten 2019, 146). In the context of the Muslim insurgency, the idea of relatedness enables us to explore how ideological cause and notions of nationhood are intrinsic to kinship, from which political and familial norms, responsibilities and loyalty cannot easily be separated. As Thiranagama (2011) suggests in her work on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, intimacy with a political movement may arise from the ways it aims to conflate nation, kin and ethnic belonging, and thereby lay claim to associated notions of morality. By acting "as [an] extension of the kin group" or as a family of nation, a movement may also adopt and assert gendered rules, as Weiss illustrates in the case of Kurdish women (Weiss 2010, 59). Following Carsten's cue, these insights allow us to ask what

the effects are of these entangled attachments for the women in their everyday lives, but also for notions of belonging and obligation. What kind of intimate politics are produced by notions of kinship that entwine with the Bangsamoro movement?

To answer these questions, we need to come closer to an understanding of how authority and dominance is embedded in familial structures and relationality, and play into the self-making of women. I focus attention on two kinds of intimate relationships that figure centrally throughout the empirical material: marriage and the relationships among women in the family and in extended form. In order to address this aspect, I complement the above with perspectives on the transmission of culture (as discussed by Das 2020), and patriarchal connectivity (Joseph 1999).

Ethnographies from around the globe illustrate how practices and discourses of marriage and love are co-produced by notions of tradition and modernity, shaped within available forms of sociality and selfhood as well as through economic and social effects of globalization (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Mody 2008). Scholarship on South Asia and the Arab world shows the ways in which marriage is anchored in familial and kin obligations, but also constitutes a site of contestation against and negotiations of social norms (Allouche 2019; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Mody 2008, 2002). For example, Mody (2008, 2002) shows in the context of Delhi, how arranged-cum-love marriage is the ideal because it affirms the norms stemming from religion, kinship and community. Love marriages, on the other hand, are considered a threat to the social order, that is, "class, status and standing" as the couple has asserted autonomy and individual desire (Mody 2008, 8). Maqsood describes how middle-class women seek to choose whom to marry without publicly challenging the norms of arranged marriage, which takes "a skillful balancing act between private interests and aspirations and between public representations and collective concerns" (Maqsood 2021a, 94). Hence, notions of love carry the potential of asserting influence and directing one's life toward a desired future, of making claims on sociality and selves – amidst extensive patriarchal control (ibid.; Faier 2007).

These insights resonate with how marriage and love for women in a Muslim Filipino context is a site of conforming to and accommodating overlapping familial and political pressures, but equally of working towards own aspirations, crafting a life and selves. The expression of "learning to love" one's husband was repeated by many of the women, and similar to Fenella Cannell's (1999) observation from a Christian Filipino context, denotes the ways in which women come to accept their unwilling marriages. As Cannell illustrates, the process of learning love becomes a way for women to negotiate and shift power in an unequal gendered relationship (Cannell 1999). This speaks to Das's (2020, 2012) point about how not only domination and alignment but also subjectification takes place in the way culture is inherited. Drawing on Wittgenstein's image of a child that inherits her culture by taking bits and pieces from her elders, Das argues that the process of learning one's culture, its rules, practices and language also requires finding one's own voice (ibid.). Hence, these perspectives allow for a question of

how socialization into a "particular way of life" (Das 2020, 177), which manifests in intimate attachments, marriage and love, is simultaneously about crafting a voice and a self.

To interrogate the interplay between authority, relationality and self-making, I turn to Suad Joseph's (1999) concept of patriarchal connectivity. Exploring the relational processes of selving in Muslim societies, Joseph (1999) defines patriarchal connectivity as the ways in which "persons feel part of significant others" within a family order that privileges males and elders (1999, 11). According to Joseph, patriarchal connectivity captures the ways in which others are always involved in the shaping of a person's self, feelings and desires, and males and elders are socialized to "direct the lives of females and juniors and female and juniors are prepared to respond to the direction of elders" (Joseph 1999, 13).

This conception allows us to explore how the self is formed relationally amidst the patriarchal familial structure, and the rules, obligations and ideas of morality it produces that mark Muslim Filipino families. Complementing this perspective, the study reveals the pivotal role of other women for the individual women's maneuvers, possibilities, survival and self-making. In other words, collective agency rests in the intimacies among women in the family and in women's circles in the mosque, neighborhoods and homes. At the same time, other women take active part in providing a normative framework for how life can be lived, as well as providing a space for and a support system that backs each other's attempts to negotiate norms, everyday struggles and survival. Hence, criticism and opposition to familial domination rests in the relationships among sisters, daughters and mothers. Patriarchal connectivity enables attention to the entwined subjectivity and intimacy between women, among sisters, daughters, granddaughters and mothers, in which articulations of identity, emotions and aspirations but also experience are anchored. It allows for a question of how collective agency of women rests in the relationality that is formed through familial dominance of males and elders. How does the self emerge within intimate attachments and the patriarchal authority embedded in kinship and family?

COMPLICATING AGENCY

In her book, "Maneuvers", Enloe (2000) argues that militaries need women to be successful. She illustrates the various maneuvers through which women's lives are militarized through deliberate attempts to control, regulate and make women depend on militaries in economic, social and ideological terms (ibid.). In this study, I use the term maneuvering to reverse the perspective. How do women deal with and find ways to live a life amidst militarization, inescapable conflict and the violences it produces? Maneuvering here means to move carefully and skillfully, although with difficulty. Maneuvers are intended actions that are not straightforward, but evasive and shifting, entail dilemmas, and may leave limited room for

maneuvering. Thus, a question that informs the three articles is how conflict constitutes a framework for women's possibilities for action. There is not one answer to this. As the articles show, the women's agency is situated and shaped by their particular circumstances in each of the contexts, and by the pressures and norms of family, community and nation. Simultaneously, the women negotiate and seek to reconcile conflicting aspirations and demands through concealments, silences, learning and affective work, such as learning to love or caring for husbands in prison, that enables them to survive, and make a life and selves, as the articles on Maharlika and Palawan show. As such, maneuvering comes to denote the composite and creative forms of agency available to women, which are set in and shaped by conflict and patriarchal familial structures. Analytically, I conceptualize maneuvering through perspectives on agency that takes everyday forms, is relational and tied to social and gendered norms and obligations.

Liberal feminist ideals of agency as the assertion of individual choice, freedom and emancipation from domination do not resonate with this study. In line with a number of scholars focusing on women in Muslim societies, I privilege an understanding of agency that centers on commitment, belonging, obligation and creativity (Abu-Lughod 1990; Joseph 1999; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Maqsood 2021a 2021b; Segal 2016). Saba Mahmood's (2005, 2001) work on women in the piety movement in Egypt offers some key understandings. Mahmood addresses a question to which feminist theory lacks answers: Why do women support and insert themselves in a socio-religious movement that builds on principles and discourses that secure women's subordination? Confronting Western, liberal thinking of agency as resistance to norms, she argues, "Norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject, but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority" (Mahmood 2005, 23). Thus, we need to do away with binary conceptions of norms as either consolidated or destabilized, and instead explore how they "are lived, inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated", providing the foundation upon which agency and the subject emerge (ibid.).

Following Mahmood, I find that conforming to and fulfilling social norms and commitments shaped by violent conflict and patriarchal familial structures directs women's agency. In the context of separatist struggle, women's political activism and support stem from relational obligations and a shared sense of oppression tied to a nationalist discourse. Yet, as the articles show, political action, kinship and the women's social roles, and ideals of womanhood produce multiple, conflicting political, social and moral norms and obligations that the women inhabit, aspire to, and seek to fulfill. Complementing Mahmood's perspectives, I want to highlight the creativity and persistence reflected in the women's agency and work that goes into reconciling contradictory norms, obligations and aspirations. This raises a question of how women creatively maneuver, fulfill and stitch together contradictory norms and obligations.

Mahmood speaks against the idea of an innate desire of autonomy or freedom as universal for women in her conceptualization of agency (Mahmood 2005). Similarly, in her substantial critique of Western constructions of Muslim women,

Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) asks, ”What does freedom mean if we accept the fundamental premise that humans are social beings, raised in certain social and historical contexts and belonging to particular communities that shape their desires and understandings of the world?” (ibid., 40). Thinking along these perspectives, I suggest that we ask where such desires are located, and what freedom serves. I find that a desire for independence informs the women’s agency and is coupled to their material conditions and attempts to get by and contribute to the family, community and nation. As the article on Maharlika shows, women’s aspirations for autonomy in the everyday is enabled by fulfilling particular social expectations and kinship norms that interact with insurgency politics. Moreover, while norms provide the grounds for agency (Mahmood 2005), it does not mean that there is not opposition to or criticism of domination. I find that the women in this study negotiate and challenge patriarchal structures, but also try to make them inhabitable. An important insight from Abu-Lughod’s earlier work (1990) is that we need to differentiate between different modes of resistance to grasp the different forms of power and domination that people in a particular context live with and are subjected to. These perspectives allow for questions about how to think of autonomy not as individual emancipation but as attained through the ability to contribute to and support the family and the nation without compromising social belonging, obligations and rules. As such, how can women fulfill their own aspirations and desires through compliance?

Agency also takes everyday forms. Against the structural forms of violence and domination marking the women’s lives, which they have limited room to resist or influence, they strive to deal with these pressures and create a life for themselves and their families while also striving to be religiously and morally righteous, caring and responsible women. Developing the idea of ethical self-formation as a mode of agency, Mahmood emphasizes how ”struggle, effort, exertion and achievement” are intrinsic to learning the capacities and skills necessary for moral action (Mahmood 2005, 29). Religious self-cultivation, as Mahmood describes, is part of an embodied, pedagogical and disciplinary practice through which women come to recognize themselves and build capacities to endure and survive in a patriarchal environment (ibid.). In her ethnography on everyday scenes of African-American families, Cheryl Mattingly (2013) explores the mundane practices through which people seek to make moral selves. Adding to anthropological discussion of morality, Mattingly points to how moral action aiming at good lives for oneself and significant others is a dilemma-filled, ambiguous and vulnerable affair, as the courses of action may have unintended and uncertain impact (Mattingly 2013). Hence, the transformation of oneself and the spaces in which one live in ordinary life, are anchored in the attempts to “move toward it, to inhabit it, to cultivate it” (Mattingly 2013, 324). Mahmood’s and Mattingly’s perspectives allow us to focus attention on how the everyday is a site of moral action, in which the cultivation of religious and moral selves takes place. Political commitment, support and accommodating the separatist cause form part of the women’s everyday moral agency in this study. In her work on women in the Shiv

Sena movement in Bombay, Atreyee Sen (2007) uses the terms "permissive" and "active" agency to capture women's invisible and visible engagement in violence, through which they seek empowerment and voice in the family, community and the political movement. Permissive agency centers on the ways women develop a system and structures that provide practical and emotional support for the members at the front of the movement. Active agency is the violent, public action in which women themselves participate (Sen 2007).

These insights enable attention to the work of women that goes into surviving and providing care and support for intimate others, which may include both family and political movement. Sen's perspectives allow us to conceive of women's subtle modes of agency "behind the scenes" as assisting own gendered interests without openly threatening a nationalist discourse and patriarchal values. In this study, women's participation in the Bangsamoro movement is not a liberating project for women, but rather moral action that is given life and meaning through intimate and family relations. As the article on Mindanao shows, political engagement is resistance toward a shared sense of suppression that builds on compliance to gendered forms of domination. Meanwhile, providing care and practical and emotional support may not merely be in the service of a higher political cause but motivated by both moral ideals and own aspirations of mobility and independence in daily life, as I explore in the second article. Grounded in the women's everyday lives, these forms of agency are connected to cultivating and fulfilling moral and religious ideals of womanhood which, Mahmood reminds us, is a self-making project that entails struggle and effort to accept and be able to live with structural and patriarchal domination. Complementing this understanding, Mattingly's perspectives allow us to appreciate the transformative potential of moral action in the everyday. On this basis, I ask how the women's religious, moral and emotional work as well as their struggles to cope, endure, get by and survive economically animate their everyday maneuvers.

3

METHODOLOGY: TRACING THE CONFIGURATIONS OF CONFLICT IN WOMEN'S LIVES

The methodology used in this study is best captured as feminist, which is not self-explanatory. In particular, drawing much inspiration from anthropology both conceptually and in terms of ethnographic methods, I find it necessary to consider what Marilyn Strathern (1987) calls "an awkward relationship" (ibid., 276) between the two fields. Strathern points to the proximity between feminism and anthropology, one in which they are mutually "mocking each other", each achieving the ideal that is elusive to the other. Feminism, she asserts, exposes the predicament in anthropology of the ultimately different interests between the anthropologists and their research subjects, as the aim is social and cultural comparison, which is premised on analytical distance (Strathern 1987). This predicament is set in how interlocutor and anthropologist inhabit fundamentally different social worlds, which partly rests on a disciplinary heritage shaped around colonial relations (ibid.). On the other hand, Strathern suggests, feminism's commitment to call out relations of domination and oppression and the erasure of women stands in the way of sharing experience with the "nonfeminist other", which is what anthropologists attain through distance (Strathern 1987). This, Strathern points out, results in an ambivalence, inherent to combining a feminist methodology with anthropological approaches, that consists of how the researcher relates to the field and research subjects.

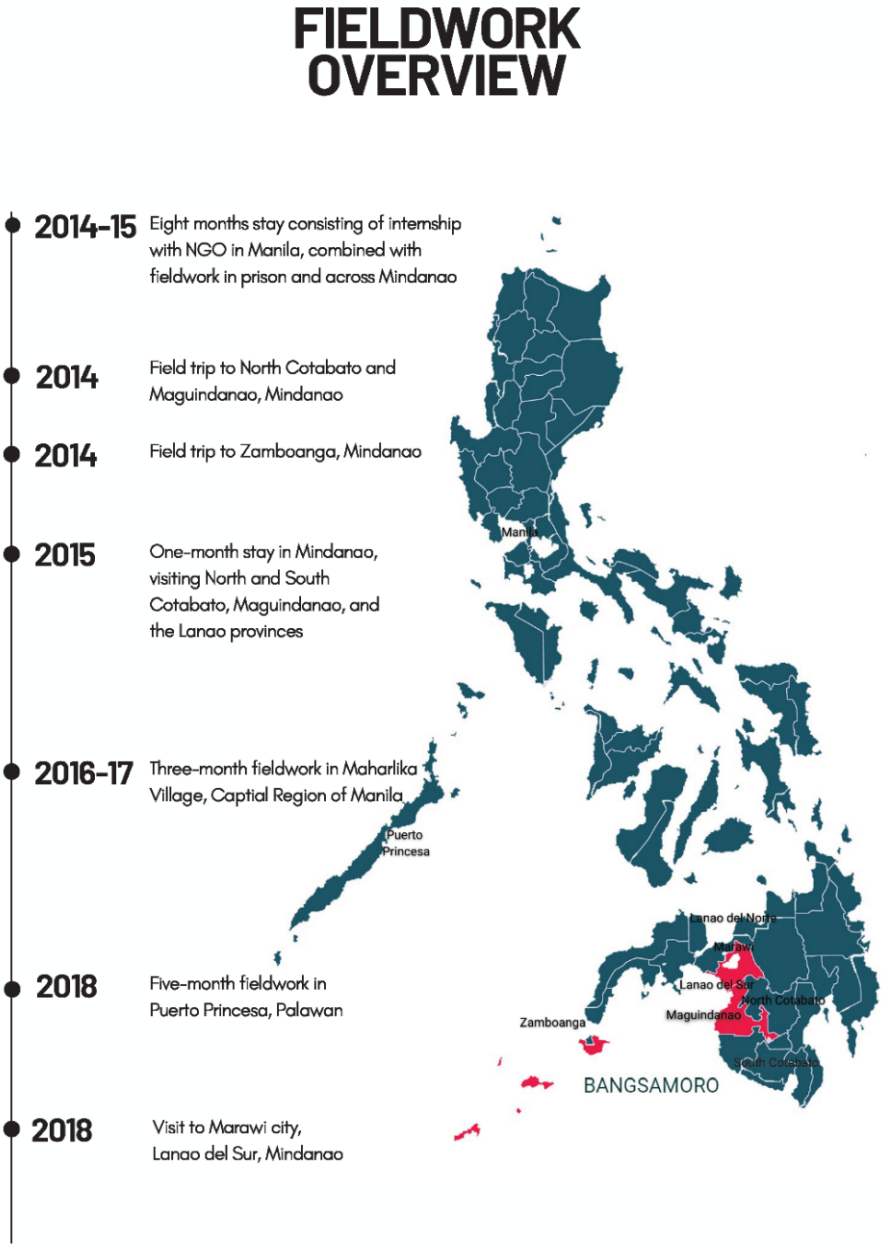
For long, the ethos of feminist research has been to "take all women's lives seriously", a phrase coined by Cynthia Enloe (2004, 2013), which involves close attention to the everyday, emotions and the intimate (Wibben 2016). While this approach informs my own outlook, more so than visibilizing women's lives and the oppressive forces in which they are shaped, my aim is to interrogate the weavings of these forces with notions of intimacy, affective relations and the everyday. Acknowledging the awkwardness identified by Strathern, I suggest that this is where anthropology offers some perspectives that complement feminist theory; that is, the forms of women's agency that are nested in patriarchal structures, intimacy and relationality in women's networks and relationships in the family, which may not be premised on the striving for emancipation that fundamentally defines the feminist project. Speaking back to mainstream feminism, this raises the uncomfortable question of how we are to take all women's lives seriously, if we do not recognize these forms of agency. Chandra Mohanty's (2003) critical

perspectives are useful here, as she confronts how Eurocentric discourse and essentially white women's experience underlie the Western, feminist project (Mohanty 2003). The essentializing of women as an already constructed and coherent category defined by shared oppression, interests and visions, she writes, make feminist analysis blind to the heterogeneous and context-specific experiences of non-Western women (ibid.). Becoming a woman, Mohanty asserts, is always more than a gendered construct, involving "various systemic networks of class, race, (hetero)sexuality and nation" (ibid., 55).

Hence, to grasp the individual or collective expressions of what Mohanty calls "oppositional agency" in women's daily lives, we must look to the intersections of various relations of rule that are set in not binary but rather fluid structures of domination (ibid.). This perspective complemented with anthropological insights that elude the normative project of feminism helps me approach the ways in which women inhabit and make a life within the suppressive structures characterizing their social worlds and contexts.

The aim of this chapter is to present how this inquiry is reflected in the three fieldworks and my encounters and engagements with women, who generously shared their stories and became my interlocutors in each these settings. Firstly, I describe the three sites of fieldwork – in Manila, Mindanao and Palawan (see table 2). The subsequent section outlines the methods and material in relation to the overall research questions. The chapter ends with my ethical reflections on the field relationships, positionality and issues of representation.

Table 2


FIELDWORK OVERVIEW
2014-15
Eight months stay consisting of internship with NGO in Manila, combined with fieldwork in prison and across Mindanao
2014
Field trip to North Cotabato and Maguindanao, Mindanao
2014
Field trip to Zamboanga, Mindanao
2015
One-month stay in Mindanao, visiting North and South Cotabato, Maguindanao, and the Lanao provinces
2016-17
Three-month fieldwork in Maharlika Village, Captial Region of Manila
2018
Five-month fieldwork in Puerto Princesa, Palawan
2018
Visit to Marawi city, Lanao del Sur, Mindanao
Manila
Puerto Princesa
Lanao del Norte
Lanao del Sur
North Cotabato
Maguindanao
Zamboanga
BANGSAMORO

THE FIELDWORKS

The empirical basis of this dissertation is 15 months of fieldwork across Muslim communities in the Philippines, between 2014 and 2018. What generally directed the encounters during the fieldworks was movement within and between kinship networks as well as what we may call women's communities, which are not to be conceived as iterations of imagined communities (Anderson 1991). Rather, this refers to a group of women who support one another in economic, practical, social and emotional ways in their struggles to get by and provide for their families. The kinship networks consist of those who the women referred to as family, and include different generations, as well as affinal and consanguine ties. Both kinship networks and the women's communities were structured around age and male-dominated hierarchies. One of the kinship networks consisted of families in Mindanao, who have taken part in the separatist movement from its onset, which includes the women. In the context of the prison in Manila, I came across another kinship network, in which the women in Maharlika were connected to political prisoners as distant relatives or through their shared origin in the Muslim areas in the southern parts of Mindanao prior to marrying. The women themselves were not all related to each other but constituted a group based on their marriages with political prisoners. Finally, I moved between and within kinship groups in Palawan, where many of the women were part of the same three clans and extended kin groups.

The three fieldwork settings represent women whose lives are affected by the separatist conflict in distinct ways. In Mindanao, the women lived in the midst of armed conflict. In Manila, the women were geographically at a distance from the armed conflict, while being socially enmeshed with the insurgency through home communities and marriage with imprisoned rebel suspects. In Palawan, the women were geographically and socially detached from the political struggle and the military interventions in Mindanao; nonetheless, the political conflict took other violent forms that stuck to them and delineated how they were able to live their everyday lives. The empirical material is based on the stories of and engagement with 33 women, whom I would characterize as key participants, although the time spent with each of them varies considerably. The women are presented in greater detail in the following chapters; for now I focus on some of the common characteristics and conditions of the interlocutors and our encounters in each of the contexts.

THE PRISON CONTEXT OF MANILA

In the Manila context, my engagements with women associated with the conflict took place on both sides of the prison walls. During the internship in 2014, my first fieldwork took shape inside a prison, where more than 300 Muslims accused of rebellion or terrorism were detained. They had been arrested in relation to the fighting between the MNLF and the Philippine military, in the so-called Zamboanga siege the year before, and subsequently transferred to Manila. Among these political prisoners, as the NGO staff referred to them, four were women. The NGO's prison team gave me permission to accompany them during their visits as part of documenting the conditions for the women in the otherwise exclusively male prison section. Not surprisingly, given the fact that I came with the NGO in charge of most of the basic service delivery, the women agreed to have me as a visitor. Thus, over a four-month period, I spent a day or two a week in the prison.

The women were sharing a cell at the ground floor adjacent to the small kitchen area (where the inmates prepared their meals) and the two cells that had been converted into the visiting area. It was there that I would try to seek out a spot as far away as possible from the prison guards to speak with them. Two of the women quickly showed their reluctance to participate and simply stayed away from the visiting area when I was there. On the other hand, the two younger women, Nur and Juhaira, who appeared to have a somewhat trusting relationship with the NGO, would come over to talk unless they were busy cooking or doing other assignments. Juhaira's husband was also incarcerated, and they had it arranged that they could cook lunch together for the prison section several times a week. This allowed them to earn 100 pesos a day, the equivalent to two US dollars, of which they saved half to be able to set up a life for themselves and their children once they were released.

Doing fieldwork inside a prison, as an enclosed site of state power, unfreedom and uncertainty, comes with a particular set of considerations about the vulnerability and risks involved for the inmates as well as the intrinsic complicity of the researcher (Jefferson, Martin and Bandyopadhyay 2014). The fact that the women were not yet convicted and that several NGOs, including the one I was affiliated with, were working for their release naturally defined our conversations. We never talked about their involvement in the insurgency, and I would cautiously ask about their everyday life in the prison, their lives and families at home and their hopes for the future. The women's stories gradually took shape through their own narratives that centered on their familial roles and responsibilities, and details provided by the NGO staff, other inmates and in some cases some of their relatives and acquaintances on the outside.

Meanwhile the dynamics between the women and their varying performances and accounts, depending on who were present during our conversations, revealed insights into their relationships with the conflict, and the social and political hierarchies, divisions and tensions within the separatist movement. An elderly man, who was a high-ranking MNLF commander and clearly the leader

among the inmates, was eager to take part in the conversations and, as he put it, offer his assistance in translating for the women who mostly spoke in their first language. His superiority over the women made it impossible to decline his offer, as it would mean that the women would avoid speaking with me during the visits. On the other hand, accepting his presence meant that he took over the conversation and spoke on behalf of the women. As the fieldwork progressed, I became drawn into a conflict between the two elderly women on the one side and Nur on the other, who was clearly at the bottom of the prison hierarchy. The women made life hard for Nur in a number of ways, which culminated with beatings and death threats. Seemingly as a way of protecting herself and trying to make me and the NGO staff side with her, Nur started to share confidential and compromising details about the other women and befriended some of the prison guards, which only made things worse. It turned out that the women represented two different insurgencies and thus they mimicked the antagonism between these groups, which entwined with kinship ties. This illustrates some of the implications of doing fieldwork not only in prisons but in an environment of conflict, in which stakes are immense for the interlocutors (Robben 1995). As Jefferson argues, prisons put "the inherent vulnerabilities of ethnography into particularly sharp relief" (2015, 169). In this densely politicized space, I could not avoid becoming part of the women's attempts to position themselves in the prison relations and hierarchies, which reflected some of the larger conflict dynamics on the outside.

My second fieldwork, in late 2016, was directly born out of my earlier work. While conducting fieldwork inside the prison two years earlier, we always passed a varying number of female visitors outside the prison gates, who caught my attention. The women would be standing in front of the entrance with their small children, and bags of food and other necessities, while awaiting permission to enter or to be sent away. Their clothing revealed that they were Muslim. Appearing uneasy and at the same time familiar with the prison and its procedures, they were obviously frequent visitors, which led me to believe that they were relatives of the prisoners. I did not get a chance to meet them, but one of the NGO staff said that they had left Mindanao to follow their husbands to Manila and lived in proximity to the jail in Maharlika Village, the largest Muslim neighborhood in Metro Manila. In fact, the NGO had developed a livelihood program for the families of the political prisoners, in which some of them had taken part. At this time, I was intrigued by questions about the political roles of these wives in the separatist struggle. I was particularly interested in whether the act of leaving the peripheries of the country to stand by their husbands during imprisonment in the capital was read as a political contribution, a sacrifice or martyrdom. Hence, these encounters became the starting point for my subsequent fieldwork, which largely depended on the approval of and introduction through the NGO. Being concerned about what would be in it for the women, the NGO staff was wary of setting me up with them. On the other hand, I sensed that the NGO also felt compelled to offer its assistance because of my earlier affiliation with them, and the fact that I had also earlier been working with one of their donors. After some negotiations,

they agreed to facilitate the contact to one of the wives, Amira. This led to a three-month fieldwork in Maharlika Village, where I came to know a number of women who were indeed familiar with the prison but not in the way I had been told. It turned out that the women had left Mindanao for different reasons, and that most of them had married their partners inside prison as part of or after settling in the capital. In this way, the fieldwork opened up for questions of how the women's pursuit of marriage with political prisoners reflected the ways in which insurgency and familial attachments and obligations entwine, but also of the women's mobility and possibilities for making a life.

Appearing to be a women's leader in this context, Amira quickly made it clear that I could visit her house on Mondays, when the jail was closed for visits, to meet with her and the other women. Besides Amira, her sister and four of her children, a varying number of relatives and women acquaintances who had recently arrived from Mindanao or returned from the Middle East lived in the small house. As a trained midwife, Amira also opened her house to services for local women, who could not afford the health clinics. My stays at Amira's house provided insights into a community of women that worked as a collective support system and contributed to their individual survival, and their attempts to make a life for themselves and their children. This encounter also became a window into both the entanglements between the insurgency and kin but also the trajectories between Mindanao, Maharlika and the Middle East as locations that each play into how the women negotiate and position themselves in relation to the conflict. Originating from the conflict areas in Mindanao, the women aspired to working abroad in the Middle East, which would allow them an otherwise impossible source and level of income. Between their place of origin and work destination, Maharlika served as a transit hub, but also as a better alternative to having to return to Mindanao.

Amira’s home, Maharlika, 2017

THE CONFLICT CENTER OF MINDANAO

As part of the NGO work on peacebuilding and projects for internally displaced communities, I went to Mindanao several times. These stays became my entry point to meeting women, who were involved in the Bangsamoro cause in different ways. The NGO staff in central Mindanao also served as important gatekeepers, who not only set me up with their acquaintances, neighbors and networks in the conflict-affected areas, but also let me in on the local situations, political alliances and enmities. They were always concerned about my safety. For the same reason, the Manila office had only reluctantly allowed me to go to Mindanao, and I was aware that having me there was a liability for the local staff[4]. I tried to follow their instructions closely, keep a low profile and return their favors of helping with the research, which had been imposed on them by their bosses in Manila. After ending the internship in early 2015, I went back to Mindanao for a month of fieldwork in different places, when I visited the women to whom I had previously been introduced. I would stay in one place for a few days before traveling to the next town where I had set up meetings in advance. In this way, I ended up visiting several areas in North Cotabato, Maguindanao and the Lanao provinces, which at the time were part of the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao, as well as majority Muslim neighborhoods in Zamboanga and South Cotabato. Hearings, symposiums and consultations related to the peace process were taking place all over Mindanao, which I attended when possible. This allowed me to meet women who represented various standpoints in relation to the envisioned peace agreement.

In 2018, I found my way back to Mindanao for a shorter stay during my fieldwork in Palawan. The conflict landscape had changed remarkably as a result of the continued martial law and unstable situation in the Lanao del Sur, where most of the inhabitants from Marawi still lived as internally displaced. This time, with all inbound travel strongly discouraged, a friend whom I had come to know in Manila helped me set up a visit. She connected me with a youth organization, Duyog Marawi, working on the humanitarian situation in Marawi, that assisted me in meeting a number of displaced women as well as women who were frontrunners in campaigning for the newly signed Bangsamoro Organic Law. This trip added perspectives on how these critical events, the Marawi war and the signing of the most recent peace agreement, which had taken place since my last stay almost four years earlier, reconfigured the understandings and narratives of the conflict among women.

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[4] At the time, the peace process produced high levels of localized violence not only in central Mindanao but in the entire region. During my first stay in Midsayap in North Cotabato, fighting broke out between one of the insurgency groups, the Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters and the local military detachment, resulting in Midsayap being under high alert and imposition of curfews. Moreover, there had been a number of kidnappings of both Filipinos and foreigners in different parts of Mindanao, which appeared to be Balay's main concern.

Most of my interlocutors had lived most of their lives as active participants in the struggle as members of the two main separatist organizations, the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Some of them, including Hana and Bai, whose stories are presented in the third article, joined the underground warfare in the early 1970s and had climbed the ranks and become part of the leadership. Their continued prominent roles in the struggle resulted not only from their own political activities, but also from marriage with commanders within the movement and their belonging to important families, which had collectively enrolled in the fight when the MNLF emerged. While these women largely represented the separatist leadership, others were among the rank and file of the Moro Liberation Fronts or merely supported the Bangsamoro cause. In early 2015, I spent a few days with a group of MILF grassroots members, who had moved from the Lanao provinces to South Cotabato to find work. All of them clearly suffered from the general poverty, social inequality and high unemployment rate in Mindanao. However, this group of young women conceived the conflict solely in religious terms, contrary to the older generation of women I had met and who stressed revolutionary ideas of social change that dominated the 1970s. To this younger generation, the struggle was jihad in the strict sense of the word, meaning that their ideal society would be founded on Islamic principles, Sharia law and madrassah education, which would allow them to live fully in accordance with the conservative principles prescribed for Muslim women. Hence, they also believed that it was inappropriate for women to be actively involved in the struggle.These encounters brought attention to the generational differences among women in how they conceive of gender, Islam and the conflict, which reflect the political and societal currents of their time. Simultaneously, it enabled a view on how structural features, the lack of possibilities, income and marginalization, cut across generations, and were reflected in the accounts of the elderly women about their reasons for joining the revolutionary struggle in the early 1970s as well as in the younger women's explanations of their support for jihad.[5]

[5] Exploring a similar generational shift from being secular revolutionaries to embracing traditional Islamic values among Palestinians in Denmark, Kublitz argues that structural continuities of being caught between "the national order of things" shape both positions as liminal becomings (Kublitz 2016)

Zamboanga 2014

THE DOUBLE PERIPHERY OF PALAWAN

In 2018, I returned to the Philippines for another five months of fieldwork, this time in the western province of Palawan. As the least populated province in the country, Palawan is roughly made up of a southern part with large Muslim and other indigenous areas, and a predominantly Christian, Tagalog speaking north. Lacking infrastructure and employment possibilities (except from a major copper mining company), the more rural Muslim areas in the south are reputed as unsafe and having higher levels of threat and criminal activities. In contrast, the northern parts are a favored tourist destination, which shows in the infrastructure and investment priorities in the province.

The decision to explore the ramifications of the conflict in this context derived from the observation that despite having a significant Muslim population, the separatist project and the Bangsamoro identity did not seem to resonate in Palawan. Historically, the Palawan together with Mindanao and Sulu were the regions on which the separatist movement laid claim. Yet, in the plebiscites following the peace agreements between the MNLF and the Philippine government from 1976, the Muslims in Palawan voted against being included in an autonomous Bangsamoro territory. The outcome of the most recent peace deal in 2018 was that Palawan was not among the included areas in the proposed bill. My curiosity then revolved around how and to what extent the troubled relationship between Muslims in the south and the Philippine state shaped the lives of Muslim communities in Palawan.

I resided and conducted most of the fieldwork in the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa city, where approximately 6,000 of the 300,000 inhabitants are Muslim. A friend from Manila had introduced me to his family who lived across the street from the oldest Muslim neighborhood in the city. Thus, initially relying on my friend's family, and in particular his 18-year-old sister, Jessica, I gradually came to know the Muslim families living in two neighboring barangays[6]. Norabel, a Muslim native to Palawan and the sister-in-law to Sittie and Hayati, who are among the protagonists in the first article, also became an important gatekeeper. Being in charge of the nutrition program for the high number of undernourished children in the barangay, Norabel knew the families intimately, and was a much cherished community member. Shortly after we had met, she gathered all the women in the barangay to inform them about my project and encourage them to participate.

Twelve women ended up agreeing to have me around. Several times a week, I visited the women's homes, the local markets downtown and the bus terminal where most of them worked as vendors. The barangay where Norabel, Hayati and Sittie lived was considered the first place in the city where Muslim migrant families from Mindanao and Sulu settled three generations ago. As the families had

[6] A barangay is the smallest administrative unit under the Philippine state.

grown, the land on which they resided had shrunk. The remaining families were roughly three Maranao clans who had been able to buy the small plots of land surrounding the mosque decades ago. Norabel, Sittie and Hayati resided in a house that had been converted into six separate one-room households that each counted parents, children and grandchildren. Another three houses on the other side of the mosque belonged to two sisters, who lived there with their extended families, including a few distant relatives who had recently come from Mindanao. Facing the street, a slightly wealthier clan lived in two big houses, among them the newly appointed barangay captain. Those who had been unable to buy land were relocated to other places in the city, as the municipality increasingly reclaimed these areas. Some of them lived in the neighboring barangay, which primarily consisted of informal housing, where the Muslim inhabitants also faced the municipality's gentrification plans. A year prior to my stay, a fire had destroyed most of the Muslim homes in this barangay. It was not the first time that the neighborhood burned down, but this time the municipality used the fire as a reason for relocating the Muslim families outside of the city, which most of them refused. In this barangay, I primarily worked with two families who had left the southern part of Mindanao in the late 1970s as a result of the war, which had made it impossible to earn a living and for children to finish school. In Palawan, they also struggled to get by and the occasional fires had forced them to start over several times in making a home and a life, which had become increasingly difficult with the municipality's pressure to make them leave.

Working as vendors, the women's livelihood situation was highly insecure. Not being able to sell anything was a central topic of conversation and particularly evident when meeting the women at the bus terminal and the markets, where sales were extraordinarily low throughout my stay. Hence, they took up loans to upgrade their assortment of goods, delayed the payments of stall rent, and tried to avoid the market managers, who continuously raised the price for a spot. At the same time, the women's income largely depended on the money earned during the Christmas season. As early as September, they would start to change their stock towards Christmas presents. They had a kind of cooperation, in which one of them took charge of buying a large amount of plastic toy guns, usually "the bestselling item", for each of the women to sell. This enterprise was supposed to secure their income some months into the new year through reinvestments in things to sell that could keep their businesses going.

The women shared the same precarious and confining living circumstances in the two barangays. While some had left Mindanao as children or young women, and others were born in Palawan, and had never lived in Mindanao, the conflict was structurally present in Palawan in the way they were unwanted and excluded as Muslim migrants, and for some as internally displaced. The structural violence that marginalized the families economically, socially and spatially was often reproduced inside of the families and in the women's marriages. As such, the women's life trajectories were illustrative of Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes's (2004) theorizing of violence in which military and political violence connects

with the everyday forms of violence. As they suggest, "Structural violence – the violence of poverty, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation – inevitably translates back into intimate and domestic violence" (ibid., 1). The violence of war that they (or their parents) had left behind in Mindanao, the poverty and marginalization they lived with as migrant families in Palawan, the patriarchal control within the families, and physical abuse that some of the women were subjected to in their marriages were woven together. Different from the two other field sites, the grand ideals and visions of the separatist struggle were largely absent in these women's lives. Rather, the women's agency rested in familial relationality, intimacy and affection that tied in religious aspirations and ideals of womanhood. Thus, complementing the two other settings in which the Muslim insurgency and familial relations entwine, these women's life stories in Palawan alluded to the ways in which self-making and social, economic and emotional survival is anchored in family life against a backdrop of conflict. Overall, the fieldwork enabled me to conceive of Palawan as a double periphery for Muslims: as detached from the Muslim homeland where the separatist struggle and political action is possible, and continuously peripheral to the majority Philippine society, where Muslims are barely tolerated.

One of the Muslim barangays in Palawan after a fire the previous year, 2018.

METHODS AND MATERIAL

Working with various groups of women, who represent a variety of backgrounds, including ethnic and clan identification, class and generational difference has provided me with a broad empirical base for exploring their experiences as situated differently in the conflict but also the shared "social positioning associated with womanhood" (Wibben 2016, 3). The methods employed in gathering the empirical material, in what ways the material speaks to the overall research questions but also the limitations of the methods, are outlined in this section.

Besides visiting the homes of the women, spending time together, observing and helping out while the women were busy with their daily doings, the material consists of recorded life story interviews and conversations, a diary study, and continuous online communication with some of the women after my stays in the Philippines ended. The conversations mostly took place in English, which the women would understand and speak in varying degrees, combined with Tagalog. Although the continued interactions allowed for clarifications and follow-ups, I am aware of the loss of the linguistic richness and nuances that are expressed when interlocutors speak in their own language. To the extent possible, I made sure to have companions who spoke the women's respective first languages and assisted with translation as we talked. Whenever the conversations were recorded, one of my research assistants subsequently transcribed the recordings and translated not only from Tagalog to English, but also explained the social and cultural meanings hidden in certain expressions. In each of the localities, I also visited the local mosques, and talked to religious authorities, local officials, organizations and representatives of the Muslim Filipino population. Besides my affiliation with the NGO during the first fieldwork, I was connected to two public universities, through which I was able to consult Filipino scholars and discuss my inquiry and tentative findings along the way. Importantly, I have anonymized the women and ensured to keep sensitive information about their identity undisclosed in the writing as well as during the fieldwork.

Most of my engagements with women in Mindanao were rather short and our meetings often took place in public, anonymous places. Our communication usually stretched over long periods, in which I answered their questions about the research, and they did background checks of me through those in their networks whom I already knew. Then, if they agreed to meet, we would plan when and where to do so. The actual meeting would often be a single day where I would ask the women about their life stories. In some cases, we would meet again once or twice, or follow up over the phone. The nature of these encounters meant that material primarily took a narrative form which, following a feminist approach, allows for a lens on how women are social and political actors and make sense of and ascribe meaning to "events and conditions in their lives" (Chase 2005, 655; see also Jackson 2002). In their accounts, the ideology and grand narrative of separatism appeared to provide a framework for how the women talked about their life trajectories. They stressed their own roles and in particular their work of trying

to make political participation possible while accommodating multiple other social obligations particularly as mothers, wives and daughters. Yet, their stories sometimes seemed scripted and I sensed that they carefully weighed what to say in order to not go against or reveal anything compromising about the separatist movement or their families. In approaching the material, I looked for the ways in which the women's capacities for action and maneuvers are entangled with and are a product of their closeness with the insurgency that runs through their familial relationships.

Having an ethnographic character, the fieldworks in Maharlika and Palawan differed from my stays in Mindanao, as I was able to stay in the same community and follow the same women and their families for a longer period of time. Rather than depending merely on narrative conversations, this allowed for insights into the familial dynamics, the women's socioeconomic situations and their differing religious and cultural practices and norms (Spradley 2016). In Palawan, it also meant that I tried out diary studies as a fieldwork method, which entailed close and rather concentrated interaction for a two-month period, and thus ideally allows for more comprehensive and detailed insights into their everyday lives (Jensen, Rønsbo and Jakobsen 2008). I provided the women with a diary, and asked them to record daily but also out of the ordinary happenings. The diaries then served as an entry point for our conversations when one of my assistants or I visited the women twice a week. It quickly became clear that two weekly visits and the diary writing were too time-consuming for the women, who for the most part balanced several income generating activities and were responsible for most of the domestic tasks and the children. I also realized that many of the women felt intimidated by having to write, as it put their short schooling on display. Moreover, writing in Tagalog was not only about lacking confidence but also about how it was imposed as a national language, which has contributed to the marginalization of the women's indigenous first languages. We soon abandoned the diaries, and only Mariel, a young Tagalog-speaking Muslim convert, dutifully continued to write down the day-to-day events, which often read, "today I have just been at the store" or "today I am sad because my husband has not sold anything for many days".

The repeated visits to the women's homes and workspace, observations of their "domestic" lives, income-making activities and conversations about their everyday struggles and social relationships exposed the extent to which the effects and tensions of conflict reach into the women's social and economic realities (Wibben 2016). Beyond the obviously sensitive and highly politicized foundation of engaging with people, whose lives in varying degrees are marked by a conflictual and violent relationship with the Philippine state, another layer of risk for the women surfaced. Spending significant amounts of time talking with me and having me around entailed the expense of time that could otherwise be put into earning money and surviving. Thus, taking women's lives seriously not only analytically but also in the process of gathering the material, required me to fit in to their daily routines, to reciprocate for their time in concrete ways, such as by bringing

food and assisting them in trying to access certain health, family and education programs, but also to know when to back off. Moreover, the material on the migrant contexts in Manila and Palawan shows how conforming to the obligations and norms of the family, but also the women's social, economic and emotional survival and self-making are tied into the relationships between the women in these settings. Other women in the group of prisoner's wives, in the mosque, as well as sisters, grandmothers, mothers and daughters worked together in trying to get by, and their aspirations towards gaining a degree of independence and becoming as women. Marriage, emotional commitment and subsuming to familial dominance were inseparable aspects of these aspirations. Most evidently, in almost all cases the women's individual stories were not only told by the woman in question. Women family members who were present, both elderly and younger, would take active part in piecing together life events, emotions and struggles as if it was their own. Meanwhile, the experiences of senior women provided a framework for how life, marriage and the family could be imagined. This co-narration of the women's experiences and lives brought attention to a kind of intertwinement of the women's subjectivity, resonating with Joseph's (1999) conception of connectivity in which selves are co-constituted in relation to significant others. At the same time, the authority of elderly women in passing on the practices, idioms and rules for sociality made visible the patriarchal ordering that also dominates women's interrelationships (Joseph 1999).

My interlocutors' stories combined with my observations and participation in their daily lives enable a lens on the women's creative and contradictory capacities to deal with the multiple forces against which they craft a life. Having moved within their homes, neighborhood and community and spent time with their families has enabled me to see the way violent conflict runs in the intimate. As the following chapters show, the women's maneuvers are anchored in their different opportunities, aspirations and context-specific experiences (Wibben 2016), and are inseparable from the collective and relational within the extended family, the Muslim community or the envisioned Bangsamoro nation. Having a feminist approach naturally also requires close attention to the field relations and positionalities, the ethical standpoints and reflexive processes that have formed the study, as discussed below.

FIELD RELATIONSHIPS, ETHICS AND REPRESENTATION

How to do justice to the intimacies and complexities that characterized the fieldwork in the process of abstracting these into analytical categories? At the same time, how to balance a commitment to calling out the persistent violence with which the women live, while emphasizing their voice, agency and insistence on making a life? These ethico-political questions have guided my approach to the

material and choices in the analyses. This section elaborates on the methodological and ethical quandaries of doing research on violent conflict in a postcolonial context, most significantly in relation to my encounters and relationships with my interlocutors, and the ways in which I make them known in this study.

My positionality as a privileged, white woman and feminist from a European country was always at work in the fieldwork. It figured in the ways in which I was able to access a relatively closed field, in how it could be advantageous to be associated with me locally, and in what was expected from the interactions between my interlocutors and me. Moreover, colonial traces read in the opportunity of communicating with most of my interlocutors in English, which was usually accompanied by a joking comment, "I get a nosebleed", a common way in the Philippines of saying that speaking the colonial language is not without reluctance (Rafael 2016). Colonial traces were manifest in the spaces my interlocutors and I respectively occupied, and in our abilities to move between them. My mobility, allowing me to insert myself in different parts of Mindanao and leave again after shorter or longer periods, was spelled out in our encounters. In Maharlika and Palawan, it showed in my daily commute to the informal neighborhoods, where my interlocutors lived and I would spend the day, before returning to the amenities available at other end of town, where I resided. When the women moved, it was to escape the conflict or in search for income. Many had taken jobs as *kasambahay*, domestic helper, in the Middle East as part of the Philippine's domestic labor export industry, what Tadiar calls the state's prostitution of the nation (Tadiar 2004). An often-repeated joke was that "a Philippine passport can only be used in the Philippines".

My relationships with the interlocutors also evolved rather differently in each of the settings and during the different stages of my researcher self. The women had their own reasons for participating; they negotiated our relationships and withdrew when our engagements were not conducive in the ways they hoped. On my part, I carefully considered how to comport myself in ways that I assumed were socially acceptable and respectful in a Muslim Filipino context as well as

how to respond to the expectations at play. When visiting I would wear a headscarf, which I thought of as courtesy and perhaps even an expression of solidarity with Muslim women, who directly linked the discrimination they experienced with their clothing and hijab. My interlocutors, however, found it weird: why would I wear a symbol of Muslim piety when I was not Muslim. In religious circles, the women called me "their sister from Europe", signaling an invitation into the group, which came with certain expectations not only of me in sympathy with Islam but also of my possible Muslim becoming. When I explained that I was not Muslim but "only worked with Muslim women and the Bangsamoro struggle", they would often go on to suggest, half-jokingly, that they would teach me about Islam for me to consider becoming *balik-Islam*, someone returning to Islam. At the end of my stay in Palawan, at the *taalem*, the Quran readings for women that I attended on Fridays, they agreed that "Aisha", after Prophet Mohammad's third wife, would be a suitable name for me. I thanked them for their

teachings and hesitantly answered that I might consider conversion in the future, so as to not give them the feeling that their efforts had been pointless.

In Maharlika and Palawan, I was initially read as an NGO worker, which produced certain expectations among the women about how their participation would, potentially, be followed up with concrete socioeconomic initiatives. In Maharlika, it seemed that engaging with me was, for the women, part of strengthening their links to the NGO that had helped me to come into contact with them and had aided the women and their husbands through their prison programs. In Palawan, after sorting out this misunderstanding, half of the women who had agreed to participate withdrew, and the rest continuously negotiated our relations to make it worthwhile. As their confidence grew, the women became more direct in their attempts to redefine our relationship. "She is asking how many caretakers you have working in your house." Jessica, my 18-year-old assistant, appeared uncomfortable at having to translate one of my interlocutors, Avijah's, blunt question implying that I would have several, especially as a working mother. Avijah laughed and jokingly added in Tagalog, "I'm available if you need someone to clean." The direct confrontation of our unequal positions, which seemed to make Jessica uneasy, also confronted my own ideals of reciprocal exchange in the encounters and the double standard of accepting the exploitative nature of the research (Stacey 1988), while being unwilling to accept a perhaps less exploitative transaction of paid work.

Throughout the fieldworks, I tried to be transparent about my standpoints, agenda and choices, in what ways I was able to help and what previous fieldworks had revealed, as well as my personal life, when asked. However, my own subjectivity was constantly influenced by our interactions and the interrelational space and moment in which our conversations took place. At times, I committed to more that I was able to deliver, I inflated my empathy to maintain the interlocutor's confidentiality and I avoided topics that I expected would expose disagreements. In this way, ambiguity was equally central to integrity as what guided the fieldwork (Piacentini 2013).

The relationships between my interlocutors and assistants came with their own set of dilemmas around their mediating roles, and positions based on identity markers, age and class as well as ideas of what is appropriate and what is not, as exemplified by Jessica's unease. I would often ask a younger woman, belonging to the families I worked with, for her availability as assistant, which came with a salary. The fact that they knew the family culture, and often would be present anyway during the visits contributed to making a confidential space for conversation. Yet, it also became clear that it could get particularly uncomfortable for them to witness their elders' emotional reactions or to listen to details from which they had previously been spared. Observing the interactions and reactions across generations added an extra layer of insights into the familial dynamics. On the other hand, when I had assistants, usually college students, who were outsiders to the families but also to the Muslim community or ethnic group, other hierarchies became visible and affected the material. In these situations, the assistant's reactions

to my questions and the women's responses indicated when their moral judgments, opinions and dominant discourse were at play or would be contested in the conversations. Yet they would provide their interpretations of the conversations, which offered important cultural and social insights.

In Mindanao, my outsider position to the Philippine context assisted my access to the women, who were engaged in the armed resistance against the state. As Raida, a high-ranking woman in the separatist movement, let me know, she only agreed to speak with me, because I was not "Filipina". Dissociation from the Philippine state backed by my biases against certain administrations, presidents and the Philippine military, which partly stemmed from mingling with leftist, Filipino intellectuals, and partly from the numerous stories told by Bangsamoro supporters, provided a sense of common ground for our conversations (Hage 2009). I would usually clarify my interest in women's stories about and experiences with the conflict, and explain how women rarely figure in the literature, and in this way, bring my researcher position back into the encounter. In most conversations with Bangsamoro women, or *mujahidat* as they called themselves, they seemed on a mission to make the Bangsamoro conflict known. Many were also well aware of women's invisibility in the struggle. Hana, one of the women I met in 2015, stoically said, "I hope that in some parts of the world, it will be recognized that Muslim women in the Philippines have played an important role in our struggle for self-determination." These women spoke a political or ideological language mirroring the official line of insurgency politics. However, this "professional" interpretation of the conflict would be complicated by the women's emotional responses, personal experiences, silences and secrecy. Their silences were not only a response to questions that could compromise their safety, signaling fear and coping strategies rooted in living with a constant threat of violence and renewed war (Green 1995), but also reflected refusals of particular ways of knowing (Simpson 2007). In contexts of violent conflict, the stakes are particularly high for interlocutors in terms of having their version heard (Robben 1995). The stakes for women involved in violent conflict also include the risks of being represented through prevailing gendered myths and moral imperatives that obscure their complexity as political actors (Gowrinathan 2021). Hence, the women's negotiations of their storytelling, including their refusals of public imageries of the minoritized Muslim South, and of the concrete dangers of revealing their participation, as well as their claim to be seen as defenders of the Bangsamoro made our encounters a space for political action against various forms of domination.

My relationships with my interlocutors also turned intimate, although I had repeatedly been warned that "too much" empathy and becoming "too close" strains the researcher's analytical distance and detachment (Robben 1995). This had both destabilizing and reinforcing effects on power in our interactions (Smith 2016). During my second fieldwork, I was pregnant and living alone in Manila, which positioned me as a receiver of care and support among my interlocutors in Maharlika. Amira, who was a trained midwife, took on a kind of motherly responsibility for me. Being much younger, combined with my inexperience with but

also what the women clearly thought of as irresponsibility in relation to motherhood, I was banded with the many young women relatives and first-time mothers from the area, whom Amira generously took care of, and guided in family matters. The vulnerability that the women had identified placed me in an awkward situation; while it made me relatable to the women, the foregrounding of motherhood clashed with my feminist self. We figured out an appropriate exchange, which supported Amira's positioning as a caregiving, motherly figure, and mine as a naïve, daughterly novice, but with money. When visiting, Amira greeted me with a warm, long hug, which is usually reserved for women relatives in a Philippine context. Like all the other women in Amira's house, I called her *ate*, meaning older sister, which is used to signal respect of the age hierarchy. While talking with Amira and the other women who passed through her house, Amira would start cooking lunch, which she served at the end of the visit. To reciprocate Amira's care, I would then discreetly give her an amount of money that could cover the household's food costs for a few days.

In Palawan, navigating a balance between distance and closeness in relation to my interlocutors was in fact challenging. When the women entrusted me stories about particular confidential, painful and sensitive experiences, I felt I came too close. While showing empathy and sensitivity in the situation, I felt that what had been shared was more than what our relationship as researcher and researched could comprise. I faced an ethical dilemma about drawing boundaries between what had been told in the atmosphere of friendship, and hence ought to remain in this confidential space, and what I could mold into analysis without violating both the women's trust and dignity and the complexities shaping their stories and experiences (Smith 2016; Stacey 1988; Whitaker 2020). While I had adopted "political emotions" of antipathy (Hage 2009) against the interlocutors' oppressors during my engagements with politically active women in Mindanao, I became overwhelmed with feelings of sadness, worry and malaise in Palawan.

Emotions that arise in the field are never just signs of inapt intimacy but carry important insights into how we understand the lives, circumstances and people we encounter. As such, emotions have epistemological value (Davies and Spencer 2010). Palawan holds a particular place in the Philippine imagery, resembling a secluded and serene island paradise as opposed to both the war narrative of Mindanao and the metropolitan fantasy of densely populated and polluted Manila (Tadiar 2004). This may partly explain why I was unprepared for the suffocating conditions that marked this context for the women and their families. Different from Mindanao, there was no apparent room for political organization and action against the forces of domination, abandonment and violence constraining the women's lives. My emotional state reflected my own limitations in grasping the unspectacular yet relentless structural violence I witnessed but my difficulty in recognizing the women's agency that took everyday rather than activist forms.

After the fieldwork, when starting to write about the women in Palawan, anxiety took over. I struggled to find the right analytical frame to make a story about their lives rather than one about violence that risks propagating all too often used

binaries of victims and perpetrators. These categories, if relevant at all, are overlapping and short-lived, when it comes to understand what it means to live inside conflict. More importantly, I find that distorting and reducing the women's lives to imageries of violent conflict is part of reiterating violence all over again in discursive and epistemic forms, as argued by Spivak (1988). In concrete terms, I have thus left out detailed descriptions of violence, both the incidents in which some of my interlocutors have been involved, as well as the atrocities and various forms of violence they have been subjected to as women but also as parts of families and communities. Following Tuck and Yang (2014), the refusal to perpetuate knowledge about violated bodies allows us to home in on the instruments of violence and thus "move from thinking of violence as an event and toward an analysis of it as a structure" (ibid., 241).

The knowledge coming out of these encounters is best thought of as situated, relational, positioned and partial (Haraway 1988). Antithetical to the god trick of "seeing everything from above, from nowhere, from simplicity", Haraway asserts that situated knowledge is about seeing from a "structuring and structured" body that connects to others (ibid., 589). Thus, a "view from somewhere" comes to be multidimensional, contradictory and incomplete (ibid.). Returning to the kaleidoscope as metaphor for my methodological outlook, I think of it as a "prosthetic device" that enables a particular way of seeing (ibid., 583) that is interrelationally constructed. Hence, during each of the fieldworks the women actively operated the kaleidoscope through which constantly changing, fragmented, but interrelated patterns of the same object, that is the conflict, came into view and challenged the usual macro-vision employed in international relations research. This may allow us to think of insurgency more broadly than the violent, political struggle against state power and sovereignty in which some of the women in this study are engaged. Insurgency is also to tell counterhegemonic stories to those that dominate the study of conflict, that focus on logics of reason, state interests and direct warfare, and subordinate stories of human lives. In her essay, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction", Le Guin (1992) presents an alternative story to the all too common "killer story" of the male hero who sets out to overpower, combat and terminate. While the hero takes off to kill, Le Guin writes, men, women and children continue the work of making life possible. Within this story, the carrier bag, the container to gather things, rather than the weapon, takes center stage: "It is the story that makes the difference … [W]e'd better start telling another one. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story" (Le Guin 1992). Telling a story of how women make lives amidst conflict while taking seriously the constraints, costs and struggles that the conflict produces for women, is what has guided this dissertation.

My aim here has been to present the various and ambiguous positions beyond researcher and research subjects – mine as a prospective Muslim, a novice mum, friend, confidant, potential benefactor, employer or political ally– through which

my interlocutors and I constantly negotiated our relationships. The women's positioning and alterations of our encounters have analytical impact by revealing creative agency and self-making as political actors, caring mothers, devout women. The dilemmas and emotional responses I faced as part of inquiring into a political conflict and intimacy but also moving into the intimate, social and emotional spheres of my interlocutors are also brought forth. Anchored in questions of unequal power in the different research stages, these dilemmas tap into how we as feminist researchers try to protect the people we study. This entails representing them in their complex and contradictory facets while leaving out details and knowledge that betray trust and dehumanize, or which "the academy does not deserve" (Tuck and Wang 2014, 224). Yet, I also find that closeness rather than distance enable insights into the overlooked stories of lives that exist amidst the dominant "killer story", in which we are all complicit. It is these stories that I aim to represent in the following three articles.

Marawi a year after the war, 2018.

4

CONTEXTUALIZING THE BANGSAMORO CONFLICT

The Marawi siege came as a shock to many observers inside and outside the Philippines. On May 23, 2017, the Maute Group, a militant group claiming allegiance to ISIS, occupied the Islamic city of Marawi, one of the important towns within what at that time was the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). During a five month-long war against the most recent newcomer in Muslim insurgency in the country, the Philippine government decimated the city to rubble and displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes (see Franco 2017, 2020). Subsequently, a new angle to the separatist conflict emerged as the Philippine news media Rappler brought out a short two-part reportage titled "Women of the Eastern Caliphate" in late 2019 (Rappler 2019a, 2019b). Funded by the Pulitzer Center, an American fund supporting what it considers quality journalism, the message of the reportage was that ISIS had gained a foothold in Mindanao by joining forces with local Islamic insurgency groups. Having established a so-called "Eastern Caliphate", ISIS and their allies now represented a major terror threat not only in the Philippines but, as the title suggests, regionally in the "East". The sensationalist revelation of how women were involved in the expansion of a global terrorist network was at the core of the story (ibid.). The reportage identified five women, who the reporter had portrayed as having a high profile within the terrorist networks and who had pulled the strings in tying local militant groups to international "jihadi groups" through transfers of money and weapons used inter alia to establish "pro ISIS" training camps. The women had become involved through "blood ties" and marriage initially, and over time developed into enthusiastic and powerful jihadists themselves "playing a crucial role" in various violent attacks across Mindanao and Sulu, including the Marawi siege (Rappler 2019a, 2019b).

This story mirrored a massive reporting in the summer 2019 on women in Syria and Iraq, who had lived inside the ISIS-controlled areas. As these areas were taken back, suddenly the women became visible and portrayed as threats. Specifically, the women detained in the Kurdish-controlled Al Hawl camp caught immense media attention with stories of how they had grown into becoming IS sympathizers, who kept the caliphate alive inside the camp (i.e. DR 2019, Guardian 2019). A major political and legal controversy followed across Europe, where policy makers discussed whether or not they should abandon, prosecute or save

the women (and/or their children), who had either citizenship or residence status in a European country.

The reportage firmly locates Mindanao within the perhaps most powerful contemporary framing of threat; the global spread of violent extremism and Islamic radicalization. The story line of the reportage combines two prevailing images in much literature about Muslim or Islamic-inspired insurgencies and about women in violent conflict. The first is that of a global phenomenon of a violence driven ideology captured under notions like extremism, jihadism or terrorism. The second is the portrayal of women through gendered stereotypes as devious, sexualized, or hapless victims all contributing to the othering of women engaged in violent action (Meyers 2011; Moser and Clark 2000; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, 2008, 2015). Yet, the problem with both portrayals is that they are devoid of the genealogy and political and social dynamics and lived experience of conflict.

In order to understand the context of Muslim insurgency and conflict in the Philippines, we need to take a step back. Moving beyond a reductionist lens on the recent conceptualization of the conflict as part of the transnational spread of a violent, Islamic ideology, the chapter outlines the historical and political processes, tensions and competing narratives underlying the conflict. As such, the purpose here is to situate the conflict in a broader understanding of Philippine politics and expose the complex and overlapping social and political relationships, shifting alliances and enmity that reinforce violence, interspersed with ongoing attempts to reach peace. By reviewing the extensive scholarship combined with a number of empirical cases, I wish to illustrate how the conflict is conceptualized through certain readings and logics that contribute to Muslim women in this context being little understood, if they are even seen at all. In this dissertation, the chapter serves to contextualize the conflict and identify the gaps in the literature into which this study seeks to contribute new knowledge.

The following section returns to the Marawi war and how it is seen as a continuity of the conflict from a local perspective. Then, the historical background and colonial underpinnings of the separatist conflict are outlined followed by a section that draws out the developments leading up to the present, through which the conflict has become increasingly compounded and fragmented but also institutionalized. Drawing on an empirical example, the fourth section maps out the social and political dynamics and relations that constitute the inside of the conflict. The final section introduces two of the women in this study as part of confronting the invisibility of women in the conflict literature.

MARAWI BEYOND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Following 9/11 and the inauguration of the global war on terror, the conflict in Mindanao has increasingly been re-interpreted within the logics of the spread of jihadism and terror by both policy-makers and researchers (see Franco 2016, 2018; Glassman 2005; Rogers 2004). Most pronounced among them was the Bush administration that did not hesitate to declare that its former colony was a key ally in the war on terror, which would also be rolled out in Mindanao (Rogers 2004).

This study aligns with various scholars who have rejected this interpretive scheme arguing that the conflict in the Philippines cannot be understood as a function of the global war between states and jihadist insurgencies (Finnbogason and Svensson 2018; Santos 2010; Sidel 2008; Toros 2008; Quimpo 2016). As Finnbogason and Svensson (2018) point to, the Southeast Asian region, which was conceived to be the second front in the fight against jihadism, has in general experienced a decline in Islamist violence over the last four decades. They dismiss the idea that the conflicts in the region, including in the Philippines, should be treated as jihadist civil wars, based on three perspectives: the lack of internationalization involving external state actors[7] and the relative institutional openness for discussing political Islam combined with regional collaboration to curb jihadist networks (ibid.). Sidel (2008) argues that Islamist violence and terrorist activities in the region do not signal a rise in power but frustration with reduced political influence and increasing "fragmentation and the threat of their dissolution", turning insurgent groups defensive (ibid., 341).

While these scholars dismiss terrorism as a major threat in the Philippines, counter-terrorism measures, on the other hand, have hampered the peace efforts (Santos 2010). As Santos (2010) argues, if we conflate transnational jihadism and "homegrown" rebellions we risk heightened conflict and militarization as well as distortion or erasure of the actual causes and nuances of conflict. Finally, the global terror scheme may also be inadequate to grasp the way local militant groups operate, their causes, networks and methods. Sidel (2005), for instance, asserts that if we are to understand the activities of Abu Sayyaf, we need to understand its links with smuggling (not terror) networks in the South China Sea and its complex relations with local government officials in southern Mindanao, some of whom are Christian while others belong to different insurgency groups. The fluidity of categories and groups in contexts such as Mindanao empty out labels such as "terrorist", and members of different armed groups may not be easy to distinguish as allegiance change and family ties overlap (Toro 2008).

[7] The question of foreign military interference can be discussed. In fact, the presence of US military forces has almost been a constant since independence due to the Military Bases Agreement from 1947, making some observers stress the continued imperial relationship between the two countries (Ileto 2005; Yeo 2012).

With these perspectives in mind, I want to return to the Marawi war, and how it was experienced locally. Although a number of militant groups, including the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute Group, have pledged allegiance or built ties, however nebulous, with transnational Islamist groups such as Al-Quada, Jemaah Islamiyah and ISIS, these developments did not inform the understandings of the war. Rather, the Marawi war was interpreted through the separatist narrative and a prevalent antagonism toward the central government combined with rumors and fears.

During a stay in Mindanao in 2018, I spent some days in Marawi with different organizations working with the displaced people. More than a year after the war ended with what Duterte called "the liberation" of Marawi City and the "defeat of terrorism" in the Philippines, Marawi was still entirely in ruins with the city center declared a "no-return zone". No efforts had been made to commence the rebuilding. Hence, approximately 300,000 inhabitants of Marawi continued to live in temporary housing.[8] Most of them were in shelters that overheated during the day, with minimal delivery of basic needs services and lack of income; others with relatives in neighboring towns, and those who could afford it, in rented rooms or houses.

Among my interlocutors, of whom most were displaced themselves, a number of common perceptions emerged that clearly situated the Marawi war as a continuity of a long history of state aggression and the larger conflict picture in Mindanao. Firstly, they believed that the siege was orchestrated partly to obstruct the peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and partly because of some geopolitical and developmental interests in the province of Lanao del Sur. The rumors were that the government planned to build a military base and extensive road infrastructure to connect the surrounding provinces. The displaced Marawi inhabitants believed that this explained why they had not been allowed to return home. Moreover, the fact that the siege happened on a day where all local leaders and the MILF, who de facto provided security in the city, were out of town for an event related to the peace process, led to speculation that the government had informed the Maute group, to make it "easy" for them to take over the city. These speculations were coupled with the fact that President Duterte, who was meeting President Putin in Russia, declared martial law on the same day, as if he had only been waiting for an excuse to once again impose military rule in Mindanao. Two of the volunteers from a peace project had permission to enter the no-return zone of Marawi's city center, and invited me to accompany them. While driving through the demolished buildings and streets, the two women explained that the city's inhabitants had only been permitted to return home for one day even eight months after the war ended. At this time they discovered that

[8] The numbers of internally displaced vary widely depending on the source. The UNHCR reported that close to 370,000 persons had been displaced a month into the fighting in July 2017 (UNCHR 2017). Here, I rely on the information provided by the local IDP organization, Duyog Marawi (https://www.duyogmarawi.org/), I worked with during my stay.

everything of value had been looted. The common reasoning was that the military was behind the plunder, as the rebels had been quickly wiped out. What was more, the bodies of people who had been caught in the crossfire had also disappeared. "If the rebels were dead", one of the women asked, "why would the valuables not still be here and the bodies not be handed over?" Finally, I was repeatedly told that the militant group that supposedly initiated the siege consisted of around 50 young males, some as young as ten years old. Thus, the five months of war and total eradication of their city through the most advanced military warfare that the Philippines had witnessed seemed way out of proportion.

This shows that an establishment of an eastern ISIS caliphate was far from part of what Marawi was about in the minds of my interlocutors. To those who had experienced the war, the threat of terror was a minimal concern; rather, the real threat was from the Manila government. At the time, Duterte had extended martial law twice after the fighting had stopped, and the status quo of the rehabilitation of Marawi made the Marawi population wary that they would not be allowed to return to the city at all. A well-respected professor at the Marawi campus of Mindanao State University said that if only the Marawi inhabitants were allowed to go back, they would start rebuilding the city themselves while the government sorted out budgets, reparation and rebuilding plans – "empty promises", as she put it. On the other hand, she explained, the growing dissatisfaction with their living conditions as displaced and the distrust in the government would make the Marawi people take up arms to take back the city. She bluntly stated, "If we are denied to go home, the war has not even begun".

Hence, the laying waste in the Marawi war was a deliberate act to once again disrupt the aspirations and political gains of the separatist movement.[9] Essentially, the war was perceived as yet another state aggression toward the Muslim population and a continuation of what drives the conflict: the continuing efforts to dispossess, destroy and take over the Muslim areas, forcing the Muslims to fight back. In this way, the Marawi experience was inscribed into a historical narrative upon which the Bangsamoro claim is founded, as illustrated below.

COLONIAL ORIGINS

Although the separatist conflict grew out of the increasing unrest in Mindanao in the late 1960s, the common perception among my interlocutors, and among Muslims in general (Noble 1976), is that the conflict is the continuation of five centuries of imperial rule, violence and oppression, which the Muslims have throughout

[9] In late 2020, I received an update about the situation from a woman working with the IDPs who, disillusioned, said that nothing had changed for more than three years only that the unbearable and fragile conditions for the IDPs increasingly constituted a threat as they provided fertile ground for recruitment to violent groups.

resisted through anticolonial struggle. Counting the Spanish-Moro wars dating back to 1521, the beginning of Spanish colonization of the Philippines, the conflict between the Muslim south and the Philippine state is rendered one of the world's oldest internal conflicts (Majul 1999; Ragsag 2020). In order to understand the dynamics and the inside of the conflict as well as the political claims of the separatist movement, it is important to look to the historical processes leading to the minoritization of Muslims within what became the Philippine nation-state.

Thirteen ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines are Muslim, of which the Tausug originating from Sulu, and the Maguindanao and Maranao from central Mindanao constitute the three dominant groups making up between six to eleven percent of the total population[10] (Ragsag 2020). Historically, Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago were part of the Malay world, where the process of islamization started in the fourteenth century, almost two centuries before the beginning of Spanish colonization, which lasted for another 300 years (Curaming 2016; Majul 1999; Tuminez 2007). The already established sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao were central in the fight against the Spanish attempts to take over southern Philippines (Curaming 2016; Majul 1999; Tuminez 2007). According to the influential Philippine historian, Cesar Majul (1999), the Moro-Spanish wars were characterized by differing political conditions, where the two warring parties took the roles of aggressor and defender by turns. Alongside these intermittent wars, Muslim elite families and the Sultanates were involved in trade and political negotiations and made alliances with the Spanish that helped the former to expand their local power or defeat internal rivals, and the latter to ensure the presence of Spanish administration in the region (Abinales 2010; Majul 1999).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Spain gained ground in the Muslim South, as the sultanates' political power and function as governing entities evaporated, although the fighting did not end (Majul 1999; Tan 2003; Tuminez 2007). By 1898, on the conclusion of the Spanish-American war, Spain sold the Philippines to the US. Following this, the US expanded its efforts to integrate what they referred to as the unpacified "Moro province" into the Philippine polity (Abinales 1998, 2000, 2010; Abinales and Amoroso 2005). Between 1903 and 1937, records list twenty armed Muslim uprisings against the "bullet and beans" policies of the US administration in Mindanao, which combined hardliner warfare and soft strategies that included education and health services (Abinales 2010; Tan 1977). The

[10] The total number of ethnic-linguistic groups vary, as does the percentage of the Muslim population. According to the national census in 2020, 4.4 million Muslims lived within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/node/164811). The census does not provide information about the percentage of Muslims living in other regions, nor the total number on a national level. Thus the estimate of six to eleven percent is based on figures of the National Commission of Muslim Filipinos (https://minorityrights.org/country/philippines/).

Americans further imposed a series of discriminatory land policies meant to resolve both the land conflicts in Luzon and Visayas through resettlement programs favoring Christian settlers, and secure the integration of Mindanao (Tuminez 2007). While the armed fighting continued, Muslim leaders also appealed to the US administration for the separation of the Muslim south from a future Philippine state with reference to their distinct identity and the long history of conflict with Christian Philippines; yet, the various petitions were turned down (Jubair 1999; Tuminez 2007).

The colonial policies under the Spanish and the Americans laid out the basis of conflict not only through disenfranchising the Muslim South in terms of land but also through divide-and-rule strategies that favored the Christian Filipino population and political leadership (Abreu 2008; Tuminez 2007, 2008). Colonial discourse further produced an imagery of the "Moro" as inherently cunning, belligerent and dangerous that continues to prevail to the present (Tan 2003, 2010). Thus, although the Philippines is considered a pluralist society, the national identity as Filipino equates "being Christian" (Ragsag 2020, 71). In this way, the broad ethnic boundary-making in the country, including the making of the Moro through derogatory connotations, has evolved since the Spanish (ibid.). Not until the 1960s did the Muslim leaders appropriate the term as part of constituting a shared sense of nationhood based on Muslim affiliation among the different ethnic-linguistic groups that otherwise had only little social and political common ground (McKenna 1998; Ragsag 2020). On this basis, we might see the Moro category as intrinsic to the Philippine nation-state formation but as an outside category, resembling what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) theorize as a constitutive outside (see also Laclau 1990). As they argue, there is a mutual productive relationship between social and political exclusion and hegemonic power (ibid.). In similar vein, the narrative of Moro nationhood draws from the ethnic and religious boundary-making instituted by colonialism. The antagonistic relationship between the separatist movement and the state is embedded in the nation-making on both sides.

Yet, as described in the above, the relationship between Muslims and colonial rulers was not simply marked by resistance and dominance, but also collaboration, trade and shifting alliances, which tend to be erased from the Bangsamoro narrative (Abinales 2010). It is important to note that the Muslim slave raids in large parts of the Philippines in the seventh and eighteenth century (Warren 1981) have been omitted from the historical reading that supports the separatist claim. Similarly, other and at times more violent conflicts, uprisings and campaigns against the Spanish and the Americans as well as rural and class-based fights against the Tagalog elite marked other parts of the country as well as Mindanao until the first half of the twentieth century (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). As part of the peasant revolts in Luzon, the Huk rebellion organized against the Japanese occupation during World War II, and subsequently fought the Manila government. As a counter-insurgency tactic, the Huk rebels were resettled in Mindanao, which became an important front of the successors, the New People's Army

(NPA) and other communist insurgencies, which have continued the armed fight against the state in most Philippine provinces, up to today (Kerkvliet 2002; Tan 2003).

These perspectives challenge what has become the hegemonic narrative of conflict in two ways; the way the separatist conflict tends to be elevated to being the only conflict that exists, often portrayed as a conflict between Christians and Muslims, and the exceptionalism that constructs Mindanao as *the* place of conflict because it is considered the Moro homeland. This exceptionalization of Mindanao serves the central government's attempt to make conflict a geographically-bounded problem as much as it serves the Muslim insurgency's claim of land and nation. Here it is important to note an often-ignored fact; Muslims live in all parts of Philippine society and have migrated and resettled within the country for generations (Eder 2010; Watanabe 2007, 2008). Thus, taking seriously the fact that the separatist conflict is one of many conflicts in the Philippines, and that conflict is not contained to Mindanao, allows for analysis of the conflict as a wider Philippine phenomenon that is part of the lives of Muslims living as minority communities in other parts of the Philippines.

COMPOUNDING CONFLICT

Following independence in 1946, the newly established Manila government, which had already been put in place during the US commonwealth period starting in 1936, continued the territorial marginalization of the Muslims (Abinales 2000; Tan 2003). Simultaneously, a growing sense of unity under Islam, with an emphasis on Muslim identity, was fostered among Muslim student activists, and contributed to a foundation for early popular support for the separatist movement (McKenna 1998; Noble 1976). Moreover, local fights over political power and sectarian violence marked Mindanao as local Muslim and Christian strongmen established private armies, resulting in the recurrence of military pressure on the Muslim areas (Abinales 2010; McKenna 1998). Then there was the Jabidah massacre in 1968, where a group of Tausug military recruits was killed by the Philippine armed forces, which came to epitomize the oppression and injustice that Muslims had suffered historically and continued to experience (Abinales 2000; Abreu 2008; Tan 2003, 2010).

At a national level, this coincided with massive protests against the Marcos regime and the formation of the NPA, the armed wing of the communist party, which seriously challenged the Philippine forces and Manila government over the following decades (Abinales and Amorosa 2005). Subsequently, the nation-wide declaration of martial law by president Marcos culminated with the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by a Tausug intellectual, Nur Misuari, in 1972 (Noble 1976). Having independence as its initial goal, the MNLF waged war against the Philippine state. As the insurgency grew, with as many as

30,000 fighters, the government opted for a cease fire and peace negotiations in 1976 (McKenna 1998).

With support from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), most prominently Libya's Ghaddafi, the Tripoli agreement was signed, after the MNLF's vision of independence was altered to autonomy, leaving Philippine territorial sovereignty intact. Yet, the agreement was not realized, leading to continuous fighting for another decade (Curaming 2016; Tuminez 2007). At the same time, the separatist movement experienced fragmentation from within because of divisions in leadership along ethnic lines and disagreements about political goals (Abinales 2000). This led to the formation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which, as the name indicates, had a stronger anchoring in religion than the more secular and revolutionary MNLF and pursued the establishment of an independent Islamic state in the majority Muslim areas (Tan 2010). Over the following two decades, the MILF came to dominate central and north Mindanao among the Maguindanao and Maranao ethnic groups (Abinales 2010; Siapno 2020). The separatist movement and its political goals fragmented further, as peace negotiations proved unsatisfactory and various other militant groups broke away from the two Moro liberation fronts (McKenna 1998). These groups include the Abu Sayyaf, which was founded in 1991, and over the following decades became infamous for its extremist methods and ties to international jihadist networks (Quimpo 2016).

This shows how the separatist conflict, like Muslim society in general in the Philippines, has undergone an increasing islamization since the 1970s, which followed the Islamic resurgence in the Muslim world, which some scholars relate to the failure of secular political movements to make social and political changes (Kublitz 2016). This may also be true in the Philippine context, where the more secular MNLF proved unable to maintain political legitimacy and support. At the same time, this fragmentation exposes what various scholars have pointed out about the fragility of the very idea of the Moros as a unified nation (Abinales 2010; Mckenna 1998). As Abinales argues, the heroic narrative of centuries of colonial resistance is at best biased, and overshadows the contradictions, divisions, internal struggles over economic and political power and the "ethnic, class, gender and linguistic cleavages" within Muslim society (Abinales 2010, 119). Moreover, widespread *rido*, yet another dimension of the conflict landscape characterized as feuds between clan, families and sometimes communities that have turned violent, complicates the attempts to reach peace (Abinales 2010; Lara 2014; Torres 2007). Finally, the economic deprivation of Muslim areas historically and up to the present is important. Nine of the 16 poorest provinces in the Philippines are in Mindanao and Sulu with the Muslim majority areas such as Lanao del Sur and Tawi-Tawi ranking as the most economically disadvantaged (Curaming 2016; Ragsag 2020).

Over the last three decades, the Mindanao and Sulu regions have been marked by parallel processes of war and peace, or what we may call "no war, no peace" (Brecht-Drouart 2015). After Marcos's downfall following the People Power Revolution in 1986, President Cora Aquino resumed peace negotiations

with MNLF, which led to the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in 1989, and ended with the Final Peace Agreement in 1996 (Tuminez 2007). The MILF opposed the premises of the peace deal that maintained Moro autonomy and not independence. Expanding significantly over the following years the MILF intensified its armed clashes with the military (Buendia 2006; Mckenna 1998). After the all-out war in 2000 during the Estrada administration, peace negotiations with MILF were reopened, focusing on a new agreement of self-governance that would rule out the previous peace deals, while armed confrontations continued (Buendia 2006).

The separate peace negotiations with each of the Moro liberation fronts may be seen as a continued divide and rule strategy of the Philippine state that maintains internal divisions and produces a power struggle over being the legitimate representative of the Muslim territories, as exemplified with the Zamboanga fighting in 2013. In response to the agreement with the MILF about a new Bangsamoro political entity that would replace the Final Peace Agreement and the ARMM (and thus MNLF's leadership), an MNLF faction supporting Nur Misuari attacked Zamboanga City and declared an independent Bangsamoro Republic. The siege resulted in massive displacements and the complete destruction of more than 10,000 predominantly Muslim homes, but did not lead to the inclusion of MNLF or other insurgent groups in the peace process (Quimpo 2016). Mindanao has also witnessed how the central government's support of different local warlords or warring clans in Mindanao escalates tensions and violent conflict, as the Ampatuan Massacre in 2009 illustrates. Under the patronage of the then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a leading Muslim political clan was behind the killings of members of an opposing clan of which one member ran for governor of the province of Maguindanao (Mercado 2010). Thus, the conflict is reinforced by the relationships and exchanges between the political center and local power, which are marked by the "reciprocity, accommodation, contestation and violence [that] go hand in hand in various degrees across time and place", as suggested by former chief peace negotiator, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (2010, 39).

After almost seventeen years, a new peace deal, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, was signed in 2014. Four years later, the Duterte government ratified the agreement as the foundation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) that would be under MILF leadership. Meanwhile, major bombings, armed clashes and outbreaks of violence have taken place, including the Marawi war in 2017 between militants with global jihadist connections and the Philippine army, which resulted in the entire Mindanao and Sulu regions being placed under Martial Law until 2020 (Franco 2020). While the previous peace deals with MNLF and the establishment of self-rule of the ARMM did not succeed in ending the separatist conflict (Abinales 2010; Lara 2014) nor the many other co-existing and overlapping armed conflicts and violence, the Bangsamoro agreement is still to prove its effects.

THE CONFLICT INTERIOR

Following the attempt to map the landscape of conflict and violence, this section tunes in on the complex and interconnected relationships between local politics, clans and separatist groups involved in not only conflict but also in providing security, peace and protection locally.

In late 2014, I visited a barangay in central Mindanao as part of a local peacebuilding project. The barangay suffered heavily from endless armed clashes between the nearby military detachment and insurgency groups, mostly the MILF, and one of its breakaway groups, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). The community had been displaced to the neighboring barangay for many months until the fighting had ceased. Displacement, with the sudden evacuations of the whole barangay, happened frequently – three times within the past four years. The displacement of community members to other areas also happened because of armed inter-family conflict. Out of the approximately 50 families living in the area, 13 families were involved in rido.

The purpose of the visit was to meet with the barangay council to discuss the results of a previously signed agreement of implementing "peace zones", particularly to protect the children from the violent conflicts that marked the community. With great authority and seriousness, the barangay officials, all men, emphasized their role of ensuring the security of the community. "We are the ones to take immediate action in case of the opening of fire, to secure the civilians", as one of the *kagawad* (councilors) said. They assured us that a ban on carrying firearms at the elementary school was successfully implemented. Yet, the conflicts causing the local outbreaks of violence were also represented within the barangay council. All kagawad were technically MILF members and the barangay captain a commander of the local faction. After he was elected as captain, his brother rose in the MILF ranks and became the local chief commander. Simultaneously, the barangay captain and his clan were deeply involved in rido caused by land disputes with a clan from the neighboring barangay, resulting in killings, firefights and mass evacuations from the area. Furthermore, the barangay secretary and the captain were not on good terms, although not to the extent that it had turned violent this time around. While the community as such was considered an MILF area, other political strife, particularly over land, and fighting caused by the internal divisions between the MILF and the BIFF caused constant disruptions of the area. At the same time, the two insurgent groups were interconnected through kinship. Concurrently, the local leaders were engaged in finding solutions and protecting the locals from the dangers of conflict; from the conflicts and violence, which they were part of themselves.

The case brings out the complexities of local politics and conflict within the smallest government entity in one community in Mindanao. In this barangay, various conflicts as well peace efforts take place simultaneously and involve local leaders who represent the insurgency as well as official politics. Moreover, while the barangay council was united under the MILF banner, clan and family worked

across this political organizationand produced other divisions and conflicts in the shape of rido.

To ordinary people in Mindanao, clan feuds are considered more pervasive in their daily lives than state level conflicts between the military and armed insurgencies or sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians (Guiam and Dwyer 2012; Torres 2007). Moreover, rido tends to interact with and reinforce the separatist conflict, with insurgency factions and military siding with the different warring clans (Lara 2014; Torres 2007). The variations, ramifications and experience of rido in itself are beyond the scope of this study; however, the underlying relationship between kinship, family and politics, and the way it informs and interacts with the separatist conflict is important here.[11]

Philippines scholarship is dominated by the understanding that clan or family politics are imperative to understanding politics on all levels, from the political dynasties running the country to local bureaucracy (Teehankee 2018). As a number of scholars agree, family and kin constitute a core institution of authority, which produces distinct obligations and requires absolute the loyalty of its members (McCoy 1994; Roces 1998, 2000; Torres 2007). In turn, the family is the main source of protection, justice and security, which has been explained with decentralization of power, little or absent institutional enforcement of laws and high levels of instability (McCoy 1994; Torres 2007). Roces (2000) defines kinship politics as political processes in which families and clans operate to secure their own interests through building ties or rivalries with other kinship groups. In this sense, the political map of Muslim Mindanao is not different from elsewhere in the Philippines, with powerful political families and clans running local politics (Abinales 2010). Examining with questions of local struggles for political legitimacy, Lara (2014) points to how the bilateral social organization secures dominance and authority exceeding community and, over time, dominating entire regions through extended kinship and fictional kinship. It may also partly explain the persistence of local strong men (ibid.), such as the barangay captain and his brother in the case above. As Lara further suggests, for the separatist movement to sustain power and legitimacy it depends on tapping into already strong political families and alliances that are otherwise the first to withdraw their support, which results in a quickly crumbling constituency (ibid.). In this way, the separatist movement has both resembled and existed in tension with clan politics as the traditional power base (Noble 1976). Its ideological foundation, based on a common Moro identity formulated by the MNLF, was in opposition to the traditional Muslim elites derived from the Sultanates and the *datu* (chiefs) system (Ragsag 2020). At the same time, the traditional leaders with noble heritage have also shifted between cooperating with Manila-based politicians and the separatists, depending on who could secure their local power (Abinales 2010; Beckett 1994; McKenna 1998).

[11] Thomas Kiefer has written extensively about social organization, clan feuding and armed conflict among the Tausug (1968, 1969, 1972).

This illustrates an interior of the conflict, in which local politics, separatist politics and clan politics are deeply entangled yet nested within different organizations that both provide a source of power and authority. These interrelationships, or what we may see as institutional multiplicity (Lara 2014), produce coexisting antagonisms that overlap with political alliances that underpin the conflict landscape. As the case above illustrates, engaging in the fight against the central state and its military as part of MILF, and participating in official politics are by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, being elected as barangay captain and representing the local political leadership is mirrored in the insurgency by assigning the brother a position as chief commander, thereby enabling the clan to strengthen its power base. As Lara (2014) proposes, political legitimacy locally may not draw from building a strong state but from weakening it.

The overriding narrative of clan politics and patron-client relationships is also challenged on the grounds of being primordialist or orientalist and inadequate for grasping Philippine politics on its own terms (Ileto 2001; Kerkvliet 1995). Critically examining a number of often-cited works on Philippine politics, Filipino historian, Reynaldo Ileto (2001) identifies how these are undergirded by colonial discourse that reproduces an imagery of Philippine history and politics as the negative, failed and anarchist other to universal ideals of the separation of the public and the private, the state and the family. In relation to this study, the entanglements of families and politics are central to coming closer to an understanding of how the conflict melds with family life and relations. Following Ileto's critique, I find that violent conflict in essence refutes assumed dichotomies between the political and the personal. Yet, the literature on kinship politics tends to treat the family as a self-evident black box. In their work on a poor, urban neighborhood of Manila, Hapal and Jensen (Hapal and Jensen 2014, forthcoming) illustrate how violence, politics and policing, as such practices of the state, inform and circumscribe intimate family and communal relations and vice versa. Drawing on this insight, we need to explore how kinship politics, conflict and insurgency shape the inside of the family but also how gender or generational differences, and relational obligations, intimacies and dilemmas animate the experience of conflict. One way of unraveling this black box is to look for the women who inhabit the conflict, which is the focus of the discussion below.

THE UNSEEN WOMEN

Analyzing the recent visibility of women in the Western media coverage of the IS war, Sjoberg (2017) points to how they are framed through certain gender stereotypes, such as the helpless victim or the pathological violent woman, which are far from new to the writings on women in conflict (Gentry and Sjoberg 2008, 2015; Gowrinathan 2021). This one-dimensional and distorted representation strips the women of agency, choice and even sanity, reproducing understandings of women as essentially non-political and non-violent (Sjoberg 2017).

In many ways, the Rappler reportage, in which this chapter takes its beginning, mimics this representation. Portrayals of "jihadi brides" who, when losing a husband, marry another terrorist, the cunning woman anomaly, echoing what Sjoberg and Gentry (2008) identify as the monster or she-devil trope, and the hapless victim reinforce not only women's stereotypes but also imageries of an inherently evil Islam. At the same time, women are largely invisible in the writings on the Muslim insurgency and conflict in Mindanao as elsewhere in the Philippines. In this way, the story taps into the dominant depiction of Mindanao as the dangerous South and main threat to the Philippines, to which the sensationalization of women's involvement gives a new face. However, the reproduction of stereotypes in stories like these also fail to grasp the nuanced realities of women living with and being involved in conflict. Here, I want to introduce two of my interlocutors, Dawida and Nur, whose stories of insurgency may not qualify as sensational, but nonetheless exemplify why and how women get involved in the conflict.

Dawida was a middle-aged woman, who belonged to a prominent political clan of royal descent. During my third stay in Mindanao in 2015, we were introduced through a woman I worked with, who lived in the same town and was a close friend of Dawida. Since the 1960s, her family had played a key role in the initial armed mobilization against the Philippine state, first in the Muslim Independence Movement, the precursor to the MNLF, subsequently in the MNLF, and most recently, in the MILF. Hence, Dawida was born into the separatist struggle. She explained that after the MNLF lost power, and the MILF gained a stronghold in their province in the 1980s, she and her family had strategically shifted from being in the MNLF leadership to becoming members of MILF. The clan's lineage linked to the sultanate also secured their leading position in municipal and provincial politics, in which Dawida, her husband and brother took office by turns. Dawida was further in charge of the local evacuations, when local politics turned violent, or the fighting between the separatists and the military escalated, through which she had gained a particularly important position in the community and was regarded as the community leader.

Dawida exemplifies how women belonging to an elite family may be positioned in the conflict dynamics in Mindanao. Opportunistically shifting between the organizations that at different times dominated their area, Dawida's clan had ensured their persisting influence in the separatist movement and their power locally. The familial leadership and heritage provided Dawida with powerful political and public positions.

In many ways, Nur's conflict experiences contrasted with that of Dawida. As a result of the fighting between MNLF and the Philippine forces in Zamboanga in 2013, Nur was arrested and charged with rebellion. Together with 300 other alleged rebels, of whom five were women, she was subsequently transferred to a prison in the capital region, where I met her in 2014. Nur was 21 years old, unmarried and had previously studied hotel management, which her family's difficult economic situation had forced her to give up. Inside the prison, Nur was

clearly at the bottom of the pecking order. She was constantly mocked by other inmates, who would also force her to perform their tasks. After a few months of visiting, Nur told me, crying, about the physical and verbal abuse, especially from the other women with whom she shared prison cell. At a later point, I met one of Nur's neighbors and a close family friend outside the prison, who explained that it was the economic distress of the family that had compelled Nur to take part in the MNLF's attempt to take over Zamboanga, for which she apparently had been promised 10,000 pesos. This was not surprising, as I had heard various stories of other inmates who had participated for the money. However, her family also had ties to the Abu Sayyaf, which seemed to explain why she was hated by the other prisoners, who largely supported the MNLF, and in any case hated the Abu Sayyaf. Not only were the Abu Sayyaf discredited for their kidnap-for-ransom activities and lack of military discipline. It was also a common perception among the MNLF that the Philippine forces created this group during the 1980s to weaken and ultimately dissolve the MNLF, when the MNLF's popularity and strength was at its peak. Thus, without any male relatives inside the prison to protect her, unlike the other women, Nur was ostracized. On top of that, Nur said, she feared their release from prison because the women, who had strong ties to the main MNLF faction in their area, had promised that they would have her killed once they returned to Mindanao.

Nur's story illustrates how economic survival for not only her but also her family, rather than ideology or power, motivated her to get involved in the conflict. It also captures how the conflict travels with the women, who become bearers of insurgent attachments of the family and rivalries and loyalties inside prison. The gender stereotypes and discourse of global jihad, such as that seen in the Rappler reportage, offer poor understanding of the reasons why women like Nur and Dawida become involved in the insurgency. On the other hand, echoing Santos (2010), Nur and Dawida's involvement is entirely tied to the local and "homegrown" conflict dynamics. Common to both are the ways in which the conflict folds into social relations and the intimate sphere of life through familial relationships, be it as part of a ruling family through which power is inherited or as an opportunity to support one's disadvantaged family. Taken together, the two cases point to the importance of class, heritage, organization and place to understand the agency, possibilities and positions of women whose lives are lived against the backdrop of the separatist conflict, which has received minimal scholarly attention.

The few sources on the political participation of Muslim women in the country trace their presence in official politics with reference to how women have held leading political positions historically, including a few examples of female rulers during the sultanate period (Abubakar 2006; Brecht-Drouart 2013; Lacar 1991; Majul 1999; Rasul-Bernard 2013). Women's access to political power tends to be explained through the bilateral cognatic kinship organization in majority Philippines, as in Muslim communities, which places equal importance on female and male lineage, but still privileges patriarchal decision-making (Jainal, Ruppert and

Speohr 1971; Kiefer 1972; Roces 2000). Roces (2000) points to how power is ascribed to the kinship group rather than to the individual who holds political office, enabling women to influence political processes through kin ties. The analysis of politics and women follows the imperative of kinship, in which women are not seen as political actors in themselves but as part of the family acting as one. This subordination of individual family members to the family as a whole, mostly headed by men contributes, I suggest, to the inadequate attention to gender.

Two prominent Muslim Filipino women, peace and democracy advocate, Amina Rasul-Bernard (2013) and Islamic scholar, Carmen Abubakar (2006), point to two divergent movements in Muslim society that have affected Muslim women's positions over the last five decades. The first is the increasing opportunities for education and civil society organizations of women promoting literacy, livelihood training and community development. The other is the revival of conservative interpretations of Islam that dictate women's subordinate position based on a certain interpretation of Islamic principles, honor codes and familial responsibilities including reproduction and parenting, that place them in the home. These developments are central to understanding when women are seen in the analyses of conflict and when not. A large part of these works center on women's potential or roles as peacemakers (Guiam and Dwyer 2012; Hilsdon 2009; Rasul-Bernard 2013). Exploring women's engagement in conflict resolution and peace-building in Maranao communities, Hilsdon (2009) argues that although women are key agents in mediating rido and ending conflicts, their involvement lacks social and political recognition, except from NGOs, resulting in their continuing invisibility. Hilsdon proposes that their invisibility is not simply the result of patriarchal structures and culture that privilege the public activities performed by men and prevent those of women from taking place in public (ibid.). Equally important is the fact that "regimes of gender, ethnicity and class derived from global and national discourses of religion, ''war'' and peace are in operation in Mindanao, obscuring women's active, embodied social agency" (Hilsdon 2009, 361). This complication is instructive in relation to the invisibility of women, who have actively participated in the Bangsamoro conflict.

A handful of scholarly sources describe the fact that women have been integral to the separatist conflict from its onset (Angeles 1996; Batisiana 2009; Bretch-Drouart 2013; Coughlin 2000; Sankey 2018). In the early 1970s, women enrolled in the MNLF and were trained by the Bangsa Bai Auxiliary Forces, a women's sub-organization, first to provide medical assistance, food, ammunition and intelligence and later as combatants (Angeles 1996; Bretch-Drouart 2013). As the war progressed, thousands of mujahidat, as women fighters call themselves, became involved in the struggle (Bretch-Drouart 2013). Various other women's committees were created to strengthen the nationalist struggle through mobilizing money and support locally, mostly for male fighters and their families (Hall and Hoare 2015). In this sense, the struggle provided new avenues for women to organize among themselves, and expanded their activities and responsibilities through the committees, for some even as part of the leadership (Angeles

1996; Hilsdon 1995; Siapno 2020). However, a women's agenda was not part of the fight for the women, who agitated around questions of poverty, land grabbing and self-governance in line with the nationalist claim (Siapno 2002). Hence, as Siapno (2020) observes, wartime enabled women's active participation, which did not transcend into everyday life in peacetime, where traditional gender roles remained the ideal. The shift to peacetime in the 1980s for the MNLF followed the two coincident developments in the separatist movement as in Muslim society mentioned above. One was the breakaway of the MILF, which emphasized Islamic aspirations as well as Muslim independence anew, and the other was the more general turn towards conservative Islamic values that again glorified women's domestic rather than political activities. This may explain the disappearance of women in the MILF in the writing and any official accounts about the organization (Hall and Hoare 2015). Although women's units are part of the MILF structure, their activities and roles are undisclosed (ibid.). I read this as a way of negotiating the return to conservative gender ideals; as long as their political involvement is concealed, they can make a public appearance that fulfills the traditional ideals. Simultaneously, following the 1996 peace agreement, an agenda on women's economic and political empowerment started to evolve in Muslim Mindanao, and MNLF women took the lead on peace and development work in their communities and at government level of the ARMM (Angeles 1998; Hall and Hoare 2015).

The above brings together perspectives on how (clan) politics, religion and gender play into women's visibility in the context of the separatist conflict. Beyond the recent projection of women in the image of the terrorist that opens this chapter, we see that the limited literature concentrates on official politics, leadership and power and thus on women belonging to elite families or political dynasties, who are part of kinship politics. Moreover, while it is clear that family and politics cannot be separated, the political is approached as something that only belongs to and unfolds in a public realm that women have more or less access to. We may say that the same applies to the accounts on women and conflict, in which their political roles and activities are described with a particular focus on peacemaking. Here I want to return to Hilsdon's point (2009), that women's invisibility cannot be explained by gender-biased or patriarchal structures alone. As she suggests, the dominant discourses of war, conflict and Islam in this context also determine when and which categories of women are made visible. Following this perspective, I want to add that we also need to interrogate questions of how intimate and relational ties as well as class, familial heritage and organizational belonging entangle with conflict to understand the women's realities and possibilities for action, as the cases of Dawida and Nur illustrate. Hence, this gap in the literature provides the opportunity to explore what it means to live with the conflict not only for elite women but also for the overlooked poor majority and small middle class of ordinary Muslim women in Mindanao and beyond.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have provided a contextual analysis of the separatist conflict in the Philippines by pointing to some of the historical narratives and processes animating the conflict and the separatist claim, the political and social interior as well as the local processes, tensions and interpretations of conflict. The recent portrayals of Muslim insurgency as terrorism in which women emerge as playing a key role offer a poor understanding of this complex context of violent conflict. As this summary shows, the conflict is shaped by colonialism and nation-state formation as well as violent and discriminatory policies that are not unique to the Muslim Filipino context, but nonetheless pervade the collective Muslim experience of and relationship with the state. This chapter points back to the starting point of this study. To understand the social and political embeddedness and institutionalization of the conflict that is brought forth in the above, we need to understand the implications of intimacy.

The chapter also illustrates how when women are seen as part of conflict it is in the form of stereotypical images. Very little has been written about Muslim women in the Philippines, and invisibility and simplified representations too dominate these writings, neglecting questions of their diverse realities, positions and capacities.

To sum up, I identify three significant points for the following three articles. The first is how a particular historical reading frames the conflict as Muslim resistance to colonial rule, which the Philippine state inherited after independence. While we need to understand that the historical grievances and deprivations of the Muslim population are continuously felt, lived and experienced, as the local interpretations of the Marawi war shows, I also argue that we need to challenge the exceptionalization of separatism and Mindanao overriding the conflict literature. As Abinales observes, the separatist narrative of a Moro nation in defense of its homeland has been reiterated and reinforced to the extent that it "is accepted by everyone" (Abinales 2010, 120). Hence, the separatist narrative has produced the conflict as the only one that exists and one that is exclusive to Mindanao; this idea dominates public and political but to a great extent also scholarly discourse. The portrayal of Mindanao as a main threat, we may argue, serves the Philippine state and its continued militarization, deprivation and exclusion of the Muslim population. Yet, Filipino Muslims are not confined to Mindanao but live throughout the country. Thus, this study challenges the Mindanao exceptionalism by exploring the ways in which the conflict is present outside Mindanao and structures the lives of Muslims living in majority Christian Philippines. Secondly, I identify a gap in the literature concerning the way the study of politics in the Philippines, including Muslim Mindanao, centers on kinship without interrogating the dynamics, differences and experiences on the inside of the family. Logics of legitimacy and power and the interests of the clan or family dominate how the political is approached, while the family in itself is treated as a black box. This may also explain the overall gender blindness in analyses of conflict in the Philippines, which leads me to

the final point about how Muslim women are written out of the histories of conflict and more broadly of politics. To make women visible and come closer an understanding of how the conflict is experienced not just by the Philippine state and Muslim political (male) leaders, requires that we approach conflict, violence and politics not as a public exterior, but as intrinsic to and animating the intimate, the everyday and relational lives of women in and beyond Mindanao. The following three articles aim to undertake this task by exploring the ways in which women live with, endure and negotiate the intimate entanglements of the separatist conflict in the different settings of Mindanao, Palawan and Manila.

Palawan, 2018

5

ARTICLE I: LEARNING TO LOVE AT THE VIOLENT PERIPHERY OF PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

Author: Sif Lehman Jensen
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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to contribute to a scholarly conversation about love beyond dominant assumptions of romance, desire, and attraction by exploring what love comes to mean as situated in and governed by violence and marginalization in the shadows of political conflict. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Muslim women in Palawan, the Philippines, I unpack the empirical notion of *learning to love* as it occurred in their stories of marriage. The article argues that learning to love reflects the women's struggles to survive socially, emotionally, and materially, and to make a life and selves. In this way, love is rooted in patriarchal relationality, the cultivation of moral and religious ideals of womanhood as well as in the social and material dependency in the family revealing love as familial togetherness, attachment, and support. On this basis, the process of learning love captures the women's work of learning to live, reclaiming sociality and social worth within the violent and confining conditions that structure their lives.

Keywords: Learning, love, the Philippines, women, patriarchal relationality, violence, survival.

"I eventually learned to love him." This was Rohanie's conclusion of her marriage story. Rohanie was kidnapped into marriage 50 years ago, and had lived her life first in the midst of the Muslim separatist conflict in Mindanao, and subsequently in an informal neighborhood in Palawan, the Philippines. I came to know her, alongside a group of women, while conducting a fieldwork in 2018 in two barangays in the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa City. As in Rohanie's story of her life trajectory, these women's stories about their intimate relationships, married lives, and families were braided into stories of war, forced migration, and precarious living circumstances[12]. Taking departure from the women's stories about their lives, this article seeks to unpack what the expression of *learning to love* comes to mean for Muslim women living in the shadows of political conflict in the majority society of the Philippines.

I locate this inquiry within recent anthropological and feminist scholarship that draws attention to how love may be experienced, felt, and perceived beyond Western love ideals of mutual attraction and desire and its association with free choice and the wish for companionate marriage (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; hooks 2001; Venkatesan et al. 2011). This scholarship questions persistent assumptions of love in intimate relationships and marriage as an overall, univocally positive feeling, capable of ensuring happiness, and fulfillment of life itself (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 1998). A number of scholars illustrate the ways in which love and marriage in postcolonial societies are configured and negotiated within available forms of sociality and selfhood as well as through economic and social effects of globalization (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b). As Maqsood (2021b) proposes, for middle-class Pakistani women, love carries the potential to make selves and aspire towards financial security and nuclear family forms. In similar vein, in her ethnography on Filipina migrants who marry Japanese men, Faier (2007, 2009) argues that love may indeed allow for reclaiming humanity and crafting a life. The empirical notion of love as learned echoes Cannell's (1999) work on marriage and intimacy in Bicolano culture in the Philippine context. Cannell suggests that love in women's marriage stories figures as either true or learnt, with the latter denoting unwillingness (ibid.). Cannell argues that women's reluctance to marry represents certain kinds of gendered value and that, through submitting to the will of others, the women come to embody "a forced gift" that must be reciprocated (ibid.).

As these works show, love is not simply emotion in and of itself but takes shape through gendered meanings, norms, and negotiations and is about the possibilities of making a life, and selves. This article aims to contribute to this conversation of love by reflecting on what love comes to be about within the volatile and violent circumstances that mark the women and their families' lives. Hence, I am interested in how the empirical notion of learning to love reveals the women's work to survive, and live with these realities. Khurshid usefully stresses how the construct of Muslim women "as victims of patriarchal Islam" in Western

[12] The women presented in this account have been anonymized.

imaginary is shaped by an overemphasis on the constraints of marriage practices (Khurshid 2020, 5; see also Abu-Lughod 2013, 2002). Meanwhile, the restrictions on women arising from living in contexts of insecurity, poverty, structural inequality, and conflict remain in the background (Khurshid 2020). Taking this observation as a starting point, the following account seeks to direct attention to how traces of political conflict and structural violence govern the women's lives and are folded into what love comes to mean, but also *is* a means to live and become as women in such setting.

In answering this question, I seek to capture how the processual aspect of love is tied to a learnt form of sociality, drawing on Veena Das's (2020) discussion on inheritance of culture. As Das argues, the process of learning one's culture, including its rules, practices, and language, also entails finding one's own voice (ibid.). This, I propose, also pertains to notions of love, intimacy, and marriage, allowing a question of how learning understood as the process of growing into and passing on knowledge of social relationships, intimacy, and love is simultaneously a process of learning to live and becoming as oneself. In this way, the above perspectives allow me to make visible often-overlooked forms of women's agency in highly constrained contexts through an exploration of what love capacitates. Moreover, by locating love within notions of relationality, the article seeks to make a regional contribution to scholarship on kinship and selfhood in the Philippines (Cruz 2020; Aguilar 2013).

I argue that while the women have a minimum of power and opportunities to configure or resist the wider violent context of their lives, learning to love enables a life and sociality in which the women acquire selfhood through familial relations and gendered and religious ideals. In this way, learning to love is rooted in three elements: patriarchal forms of relationality, teachings on womanhood, and survival in social and economic terms. Moreover, the process of learning to love entails the making of family stories, which offers closeness and mutuality among women, and social worth. On this basis, I suggest that love comes to denote familial attachment, commitment, support, and togetherness.

The fieldwork took place over five months, during which I worked with 12 women who accepted me into their homes, families, and day-to-day routines. Moreover, I spent many days at the bus terminal or the markets with some of the women, who spent most of their time there, working as vendors. In this article, I focus on the stories of women belonging to two different families: Rohanie, and her one daughter, Jamila; and Hayati, and her sister, Sittie. Our conversations about their daily happenings, economic struggles, familial relationships, and pasts were in English, and when needed, family members or one of my assistants would translate from the women's local language into English or Tagalog, as we went along. Over time, I gained a composite image of the women's life trajectories including their intimate and relational lives, complemented with recorded interviews with some of them. In addition, I met with various representatives from Muslim associations and public offices, and I frequently went to the mosques in the city and participated in religious celebrations and activities.

The following section offers a conceptualization of learning to love through perspectives on the structuring forces of love and marriage. Then, after introducing the social and political context of the women and their families in Palawan, I move onto the article's three analytical sections. The first returns to Rohanie and Hayati's marriage stories, and how love is embedded in patriarchal forms of relationality. Secondly, the moral and religious precepts of learning to love, which enable the women to cultivate selves and a particular kind of intimacy among themselves, are explored. The final analytical section examines the social and material stakes for the women of learning or failing in love. In conclusion, I reflect on how learning to love reflects the way in which life and becoming is made possible within the women's inescapable and confining circumstances.

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ARTICLE II: PHILIPPINE PRISON MARRIAGES: THE POLITICS OF KINSHIP AND WOMEN'S COMPOSITE AGENCY

Author: Sif Lehman Jensen
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ABSTRACT

This article, from the perspective of how agency is nested in this choice, explores why women marry imprisoned insurgents from the southern Philippines. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Maharlika Village, a major Muslim community in Manila, the article discusses how women negotiate gender relations, family, and insurgency politics against the backdrop of political conflict and their precarious everyday lives. The analysis asks how prison marriages feed into the women's everyday maneuvering of the metropole, and how marrying a political prisoner is embedded in moral and gendered obligations arising from the entangled relationship between kinship and insurgency politics. Theoretically, the article argues that prison marriages are part of the women's composite agency, which captures how they aim at fulfilling contradictory desires, notions of morality and gendered obligations, which enables them to momentarily attain their own aspirations.

Keywords: composite agency, gender, insurgency politics, kinship, Mindanao, the Philippines, political prisoners, separatist conflict

This article takes its departure in a group of women who are married to imprisoned rebel suspects in Manila, the Philippine capital. The women originate from Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, the country's southern region, where the Muslim separatist movement has its stronghold and the armed conflict has played out over the past nearly 50 years[13]. Their husbands are accused of being involved in rebellion and have been arrested from the same conflict-ridden areas in Mindanao. Subsequently, the men have been transferred to a jail within the proximity of Maharlika Village (henceforth Maharlika), the largest Muslim neighborhood in Manila, where the women have been residing for varying periods of time. Most of the women married the men after they had been incarcerated. On this basis, I ask why women marry political prisoners[14]. This question allows for an exploration of different forms of agency nested in the women's decision to marry political prisoners against the backdrop of political conflict and precariousness that permeates their everyday lives. The prison marriages enable the women both to insert themselves in the city and to respond to norms and questions of morality, which are socially and politically embedded in the home communities that the women have left behind in Mindanao.

Agency in this article is thus understood in line with a body of feminist scholarship, which challenges Western liberal ideas that tend to couple the question of agency with resistance to power and emancipatory potential (Mahmood 2001, 2005; Mohanty 1991). Following Saba Mahmood's (2001, 2005) argument against reducing women's actions to a dualistic question of either subordination to or rebellion against patriarchal norms, I suggest a multiplicity of relational preconditions and obligations are reflected in women's enactments of agency. My aim, however, is also to draw attention to how choice is at stake in shaping women's agency. I introduce the notion of composite agency to capture the women's diverse and persistent courses of actions as they strive to fulfill contradictory desires, which arise from social norms as well as their personal aspirations. Mahmood (2005) allows us to understand how women willingly appropriate domains of patriarchal dominance that secure their own subordi-nation, and how norms serve as the foundation for asserting agency. Drawing on these points, I want to stress how women also creatively negotiate their oppor-tunities and engage in mutually beneficial exchanges within their social worlds to deal with their precarious everyday lives.

To grasp the notions of morality underlying prison marriages, I turn to Nerina Weiss's (2010) analysis of gender norms in the Kurdish nationalist movement. Weiss usefully stresses how political leadership acts as an extension of kinship through which gendered obligations are derived, and impinge on women's con-

[13] The separatist movement, originally led by the Moro National Liberation Front, has been fragmented into various armed organizations over the past 40 years.
[14] Because of confidentiality, I have omitted the organizations with which the men are associated, and all individuals involved are anonymized.

duct. We may understand these entanglements of political move-ment, community, and kinship as a politics of kinship, which is fundamental to the women's enactments of agency. As this article shows, it is important to stress that the women's actions do not arise from political participation or resistance; rather, the political is embedded in notions of social belonging and morality that they strive to fulfill. This outlook allows me to inquire into how women's desires and courses of action are shaped by and against social norms and commitment toward extended family structures in which the separatist project is enfolded. There is expansive literature on how kinship and politics merge in the Philippines, which shows how local and national politics are organized around strong familial networks (see Abinales and Amoroso 2005; Lara 2014; McCoy 1994; Roces 1998, 2000). Similarly, families and kinship networks constitute the foundation of separatism in Mindanao. Historically, the recruitment to the Moro National Liberation Front, the armed group that initially led the separatist struggle, was carried out among leading political clans and families in the Muslim areas (see Abinales 2010; McKenna 1998; Noble 1976). While these analyses tend to revolve around elite politics, perspectives on how kinship politics permeate family life and gender relations in the everyday of women remain unexplored. I seek to address this gap by reflecting on how women maneuver the entangled relationship of family and insurgency politics that characterizes their home communities in everyday life as migrants at the urban periphery of Manila. I employ the term maneuver to draw attention to how women assert different forms of agency in order to negotiate, bargain, and navigate the social and political relations that impinge on their daily lives. Hereby, I seek to contribute to the vast literature on kinship, gender, and politics in anthropology and beyond.

The ethnographic material was gathered primarily during my stays at the house of Amira, one of the prisoners' wives in Maharlika. Here I engaged with a varying number of Tausug[15] women and occasionally their children over a three-month period in 2017, of whom the four women presented in this account became my key interlocutors. In addition, I had informal conversations and conducted interviews with other residents and barangay staff around Maharlika, whom I met at the local town hall or at the mosques. These interactions allowed me a contextual understanding of Maharlika and insights into the position of the wives of political prisoners in the community.

I argue that marrying a prisoner is a central component of the women's composite agency, which draws attention to their multiple courses of action that help them accommodate conflicting desires and social pressures that mark their everyday lives. The marriages enable the women to respond to notions of morality and gendered obligations, which form part of a politics of kinship that characterizes the women's (and their husbands') place of origin. The women's own aspirations of migration and striving toward detachment and independence in everyday life

[15] The Tausug is one of the 13 Muslim ethnic groups in the Philippines, which traditionally originates from Western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

also inform their agency. Marriage, however, also comes with the risk of having to return home because of having children, or their husband's possible but unlikely release.

In this article, I begin with an introduction to the ethnographic context, where the women reside, and an examination of how relational and political entanglements are encapsulated in the organization of the prison marriages. The subsequent analysis is divided into two parts, exploring why women marry political prisoners and how different forms of agency are reflected in this choice. The first analytical section explores the women's agency from a perspective on how mobility and sustaining urban life is at stake for the women. The second part reflects on the politics that informs the women's reasoning about their choice of partners. A commitment to care for and stand with the men, who are suffering as a result of the political conflict, is reflected in the women's pursuit of marriage. Moreover, the women are driven by a desire to have children, which is not only a personal but also a collective concern that feeds into the narrative of Muslim nationhood. Thus, inside the prison there is a secluded section for the couples' intimate encounters. Yet, the women's political commitment appears versatile in their everyday lives, which I suggest enables the women to creatively maneuver the politics at work in the prison marriages. In conclusion, I revisit the notion of composite agency and how and to what extent it can help us understand the women's choice of marriage.

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ARTICLE III: THE INTIMATE POLITICS OF INSURGENCY

Author: Sif Lehman Jensen
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ABSTRACT

What can implications of intimacy reveal about women's engagement in armed conflict? This article seeks to answer this question by exploring how entanglements of the intimate and the political enable and condition political struggle for women. Drawing on fieldwork on the Bangsamoro conflict in Mindanao, Philippines, it analyzes four women's stories about their insurgent trajectories. Their accounts reveal that relational ties of kin, community and marriage bind the women to the insurgency and precede ideological commitment; however, these relational ties also rupture their involvement. Moreover, collective and personal closeness with war make political struggle an inevitable part of growing up and surviving. Simultaneously, contradictory commitments, dilemmas and disruptions of their relational lives caused by critical events of conflict are also read in the women's political participation. On this basis, the conceptual answer is an intimate politics of insurgency, which underwrites the women's engagement and, more importantly, their maneuvers to fulfill conflicting political, ideological, relational and gendered obligations. Intimate politics, I argue, brings attention to the women's work of unsettling and remaking boundaries between the political and public, the intimate and hidden, which allows them to reconcile continued political action and life as a whole on the inside of conflict.

Key words: intimate politics, women insurgents, maneuvers, armed conflict, Mindanao, Philippines

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CONCLUSION

As a way of concluding the dissertation, this final chapter zooms out and reflects on how the articles and the study as such speak back to Philippine studies and critical war scholarship, by relating the findings to the more theoretical perspectives on women, agency and conflict. I begin by summing up the conclusions of articles and what they show us about women's maneuvering of conflict in the three different contexts of Palawan, Manila and Mindanao.

The article on Palawan offers a close-up of women's lives, in which the sociality in the family, everyday struggles for survival and religious self-cultivation are at the fore. Structural violence undergirds their living conditions, which cannot be separated from the fact that they are Muslims, and therefore minoritized and excludable and come to be seen as bearers of conflict in a Christian majority setting. Zooming in on the women's marriage stories and how learning to love is about surviving, learning to live with and moving forward in and inhabiting structures of domination in their wider context but also in their families, the article reflects the central discussion in this dissertation about what agency then is. As Mahmood (2005) asks, can we understand endurance as enactment of agency? Similarly, does the social, material and emotional survival that reads in the women's insistence on love reflect their agency? Insisting on love, I suggest, is part of the women's attempts to change their social conditions (Mahmood 2005) and make a place for themselves in patriarchal forms of relationality and a violent environment. Although the women also voice critique of and opposition to familial dominance, the exterior violent pressures on the women and the families also reinforce familial unity, commitment and dependence. It is the affective, religious and social work of the women that is elusive to liberal notions of agency, that becomes visible through a conceptual and methodological lens on intimacy. After writing the article, I have come to think of the work the women put into surviving and making a life in the face of multiple forces of violence and domination as "intimate agency", as a way of capturing the women's attempts to transform and negotiate patriarchal family relations; that is, it is within a framework of the relational that the women's possibilities of survival and making lives and selves are nested.

The second article also explores women's marriages as a site of compliance to norms and agency. It proposes the term "composite agency" to capture exactly the contradictions, ambiguity and creativity that enable the women to fulfill gendered expectations, such as care for men inside prison, and so-called womanly

ideals, while staying socially and spatially detached from kinship rules and the effects of war in Mindanao, at least momentarily, in their everyday lives in Manila. We might say that insurgency politics that interacts with notions of belonging, Muslim community and extended kinship networks provided the women with the possibility of fulfilling their personal aspirations, which had little to do with the separatist cause. In fact, although fragile and passing, some degree of independence was attained by the wives in Manila, which I did not observe among the women in Palawan. Insurgency politics, I suggest, appears as a factor that somewhat widens the women's room for maneuvering. The women's performances bear resemblance to Sen's (2007) notion of permissive agency that alludes to women's work of creating support structures and providing care and practical, emotional and moral support to leading members, which in turn enables them to strengthen their own social and political position. For the women in Maharlika, it was clear that they constituted a support system for themselves that was crucial for their living in the city. Marriage with prisoners is not only calculated compliance, but also driven by a desire to contribute and thereby affirm belonging and attachment to extended kinship. In a broader perspective, understanding agency as composite enables us to appreciate it not just in scale, but in its shifting, situated and relational character.

Focusing on the epicenter of the Bangsamoro conflict in Mindanao, the final article develops the concept of intimate politics of insurgency as a way of understanding the intimate dimensions of political action for women. Political agency for the women in Mindanao, and even less for the women in Manila, cannot be understood as merely driven by ideology, a political cause, the envisioned Bangsamoro state. Neither is resistance against state oppression merely nested in the women's social worlds and intimate relationships (Amarasuriya 2020), but emerges out of closeness with war and violence itself – historically, collectively and in their own personal experience. The political and intimate dimensions of the women's lives are closely entangled, producing obligations, commitments and restraints that the women seek to maneuver to make a life and political struggle possible. While agency is conditioned, relational and contextual (Joseph 1999), and arising from social and gendered norms (Mahmood 2005), I suggest that what the women's stories show about agency is more about the ability to reconcile conflicting social and political impositions. This reconciliation comes with dilemmas, ambivalence and requires negotiation of the very ideas of public-private and political-personal.

Studying Muslim women in their own right in the Philippine context, yet without disregarding the fundamental role and predicaments of familial, social and political structures, I have aimed at making an empirical as well as a conceptual contribution to regional studies on the Philippines. As I have aimed at showing in chapter four, this conflict is usually approached from a state-centric and, more recently, from a transnational perspective. If we instead ask how the conflict is experienced and lived by Muslims, we are allowed to see the kind of society and living conditions that the conflict and the violent state practices underlying

the conflict produce (Gowrinathan 2021), We are enabled to see in what ways state violence is institutionalized, and pervades and governs the lives of Muslims. The extent of the institutionalization of violence is made visible by exploring the separatist conflict from a viewpoint of the Muslim minority settings in Manila and Palawan. Throughout the writing of the dissertation, I have considered a question of how the state violence that Muslims live with in Mindanao as well as in Christian majority contexts may be different from what other minority groups, and the country's urban and rural poor, are subjected to in terms of state killings, displacement and dispossession of land (see Arcilla 2018; Garrido 2019; Jensen and Hapal 2018, forthcoming; Ortega 2012, 2016). A current example of this is Duterte's drug war, which, since he was elected president in 2016, has caused thousands of extra judicial killings of people deemed part of the drug industry, justified by a law and order discourse. Exploring the drug war in an urban poor area at the fringes of Manila, Jensen and Hapal (2018) argue that while the drug war appears as an instance of extraordinary state violence, "the Philippine state is no stranger to killing its own citizens" (ibid., 1). In fact, they argue that for the urban poor, excessive violence combined with extortion and threats by law enforcers and police is a mundane aspect of the everyday in places that are framed as critical to security and order (ibid.). Hence, the drug war must be understood as a continuity of violent state practice. In similar vein, the Marawi war, which has become the imagery of the most advanced warfare so far in the Philippines, while being exceptionally violent, cannot be seen as separate from the campaign against Muslims that has been ongoing, has had various expressions across shifting governments and is inherited from colonial times. Thus, the difference may be the persistency, intensity and extent with which Muslim Filipinos across the country are targets of state violence, which I hope this dissertation can help bring to light.

Tracing the conflict into the kinship and familial relationships of the women also adds to the scholarship on kinship in the Philippines by alluding to the interaction between relationality, gender and selfhood in Muslim families. The concept of patriarchal connectivity (Joseph 1999, 11) enables us to understand how authority of elders and males operates in tandem with a sense of being part of others in the family. While Joseph emphasizes that females and juniors are socialized to accommodate a patriarchal family order (ibid.), I find that within matrilineal relationships, familial domination is negotiated and opposed. A particular intimacy and sense of intersubjectivity between women in the family who take active part in shaping and articulating the experiences, feelings and struggles of other female family members constitute a basis for how women craft their voice, selves and lives.

Finally, speaking back to critical war studies as a strand of feminist international relations, the study of women's intimate lives of conflict enables us to challenge a set of binaries around war and peace, the political and the personal, the public and the secret. Feminist scholars and anthropologists have for long called into question clear-cut categorizations of war and peace (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004; Wibben and Donahoe 2020). The no war, no peace situation that

characterizes Mindanao (Brecht-Drouart 2015) illustrates the need to rethink both war and peace. Similarly, the Palawan context, which my interlocutors referred as a peaceful place, begs the question of what peace actually means when state violence in the form of exclusion, material deprivation, stigmatization and marginalization continues and governs how life can be lived. Introducing feminist peace research, Wibben and Donahoe (2020) encourage researchers on war and peace to interrogate gendered intersecting power relations and forms of suppression and to integrate a lens on the private and the everyday, making visible the violences that stand in the way of achieving peace. Following this argument, this study has centered on the entanglements that animate the lives of women, amidst conflict and violence. Entanglements that are relational and always intimate, which the women maneuver, negotiate and contest in the ways possible to them in order to insist on having a voice and a place and making life despite struggle, constraints and domination. Entanglements that we must take seriously if we insist on telling the stories of women's lives.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

This dissertation explores how women maneuver the relationship between family and insurgency against the backdrop of the separatist conflict in the Philippines. Drawing on feminist scholarship and anthropology, the inquiry takes its point of departure from the connections between violent political conflict, the everyday, gender, and social and intimate relationships. In other words, it asks what it means for women to live intimately with a violent, political conflict.

Empirically, the study is based on 15 months of fieldwork between 2014 and 2018 in three Philippine settings; Mindanao, Manila and Palawan. The empirical material consists of life story interviews, participant observation, everyday interaction and conversations with various groups of women, who are positioned differently in relation to the conflict. The dissertation consists of three articles that each traces the configurations of conflict into the lives of women in the three different field locations.

The first article offers a close-up on the affective dimension of intimacy as governed by the structural forms of violence and marginalization that characterize the lives of women in two Muslim neighborhoods in Puerto Princesa city in Palawan. Exploring the marriage stories of women belonging to two families, the article unpacks the empirical notion of "learning to love". It shows how love is rooted in patriarchal relationality, the cultivation of moral and religious ideals of womanhood as well as in the social and material dependency in the family, revealing love as familial unity, attachment, and support. The article argues that the process of learning love captures the women's work of learning to live, building sociality and social worth within the violent and confining conditions that structure their lives.

The second article explores why Muslim women living at the fringes of Manila marry imprisoned rebel suspects originating from the women's place of origin in southern Philippines, from a perspective on how agency is nested in that choice. The prison marriages reveal how insurgency and kinship politics are enmeshed and produce social and gendered norms and obligations, which the women seek to fulfill to affirm their belonging and attachment, while simultaneously striving towards social and spatial detachment in their everyday lives. Theoretically, the article coin the term "composite agency", which captures the women's aims at fulfilling contradictory desires, notions of morality and gendered ideals, which enables them to momentarily attain their own aspirations.

The final article asks what implications of intimacy can teach us about women's involvement in the armed Muslim insurgency. Based on fieldwork among women, who have been part of the Bangsamoro struggle most of their lives and have lived in the midst of conflict in Muslim Mindanao, it explores how the entanglements of the intimate and the political enable and constrain their political activism. The women's insurgent pathways reveal how relational ties of kinship, community and marriage compel them to involve in the armed political struggle, which precede ideological reasons. While collective and personal closeness with

war make the struggle an intrinsic part of growing up and surviving, familial and intimate relations also end their involvement. The article proposes the term "an intimate politics of insurgency" that undergirds the women's participation in the separatist conflict, which alludes to their maneuvering of conflicting political, ideological, relational and gendered obligations that allow them to reconcile political action and life as a whole on the inside of conflict.

The study shows that the women's possibilities, aspirations and capacities for action are shaped by the intimate entanglements of conflict, insurgency and kinship politics. Through analysis of the relational and gendered conditions, norms and commitments that the women fulfill, bargain and contest in various ways, the study provides insights into the creative, contradictory, and composite forms of agency through which they deal with and make a life possible within conflict and patriarchal familial structures. The study makes a contribution to feminist international relations scholarship by suggesting new understandings of women's agency in contexts violent conflict and of conflict itself. The overall argument is that to understand a long-term violent conflict, we need to pay attention to how it exists within a continuum of violences, is institutionalized and a structuring force in the lives of women. Moreover, by taking a bottom-up approach to the separatist conflict, the study aims to contribute to regional studies on the Philippines by providing empirical and conceptual insights into the nexuses and junctions of conflict, separatism, families and women.

DANSK RESUMÉ

Denne afhandling undersøger, hvordan kvinder manøvrerer forholdet mellem familie og væbnet, politisk oprør med afsæt i separatistkonflikten i Filippinerne. Med udgangspunkt i køns- og konfliktforskning og antropologi, udforskes sammenhængene mellem voldelig, politisk konflikt, hverdagsliv, sociale og intime relationer. Med andre ord, rejser studiet et spørgsmål om, hvad det indebærer for kvinder at leve intimt med en voldelig, politisk konflikt.

Afhandlingen er baseret på 15 måneders feltarbejde mellem 2014 og 2018 i tre muslimske områder i Mindanao, Manila og Palawan. Det empiriske materiale består af livshistorieinterviews, deltagerobservation, dagligdagsinteraktioner og samtaler med forskellige grupper af kvinder, som er positioneret forskelligt i forhold til konflikten. Dens analyse udgøres af tre artikler, der hver især sporer konflikten ind i kvinders liv i de tre forskellige steder.

Den første artikel undersøger hvordan en affektiv dimension af intimitet er styret af strukturelle former for vold og marginalisering, der karakteriserer kvinders liv i to muslimske kvarterer i Puerto Princesa i Palawan. Med afsæt i kvindernes ægteskabshistorier, udforsker artiklen, hvad det empiriske udtryk "at lære at elske" indbefatter. Artiklen belyser, hvordan kærlighed er forankret i patriarkalske relationalitetsformer, kultivering af moralske og religiøse kvindeidealer, samt i den sociale og materielle afhængighed i familien. Artiklen argumenterer for, at processen med at lære kærlighed indgår i kvindernes arbejde med at lære at leve, opbygge socialitet og social værdi inden for de voldelige og begrænsende forhold, der strukturerer deres liv.

Den anden artikel udforsker et spørgsmål om, hvorfor muslimske kvinder, der bor i udkanten af Manila, gifter sig med politiske fanger, der kommer fra kvindernes eget oprindelsessted i det sydlige Filippinerne. Konceptuelt spørger den hvordan kvinders agens er indlejret i deres valg om at indgå disse ægteskaber. Fængselsægteskaberne afslører, hvordan oprørspolitisk og slægtsskab er sammenviklet og producerer sociale og kønnede normer og forpligtelser, som kvinderne søger at opfylde og forhandle for både at bekræfte deres sociale tilhør og tilknytning, samtidig med at de stræber mod social og spatial løsrivelse i deres hverdagsliv. Teoretisk begrebsliggør artiklen ”sammensat agens”, som indfanger kvindernes forsøg på at opfylde modstridende ønsker, moralitet og kønsidealer, hvorigennem kvinderne er i stand til, midlertidigt, at opnå egne personlige mål.

Den tredje artikel spørger, hvad implikationer af intimitet kan lære os om kvinders involvering i det væbnede muslimske oprør i Mindanao. Baseret på feltarbejde blandt kvinder, som har været en del af separatistkampen det meste af deres liv og som har levet midt i konflikten i Mindanao, undersøger den, hvordan forviklingerne af det intime og det politiske muliggør og begrænser deres politiske aktivisme. Kvindernes livsbaner viser, hvordan relationelle bånd af slægtskab, lokalsamfund og ægteskab forudsætter deres deltagelse i den væbnede politiske kamp, hvilket går forud for ideologisk overbevisning. At leve intimt med krig

kollektivt og personligt, gør også, at det væbnede oprør er en iboende del af kvindernes opvækst og overlevelse. Artiklen begrebsliggør "en intim oprørspolitik" som forståelsesramme for kvindernes deltagelse i den separatistkampen. Dette begreb beskriver kvindernes manøvrering af modstridende politiske, ideologiske, relationelle og kønsbestemte normer og forpligtelser, hvorved de forsøger at forene politisk handling og livet som helhed på indersiden af konflikten

Studiet kaster lys på, at kvinders handleevne, muligheder og ønsker skabes i krydsfeltet mellem konflikt, separatist- og slægtskabspolitik. Gennem analyse af de relationelle og kønsbestemte forhold, normer og forpligtelser, som kvinderne opfylder, forhandler og udfordrer på forskellig vis, giver undersøgelsen indsigt i kvindernes kreative, modsætningsfyldte og sammensatte former for agens, der gør det muligt at overleve og leve inden for konflikten og patriarkalske familiestrukturer. Studiet bidrager herved til feministisk litteratur inden for internationale relationer ved at pege på nye forståelser af kvinders handlerum og -muligheder i kontekster med voldelig konflikt, så vel som af konflikt. Afhandlingen argumenterer for, at for at forstå en langvarig voldelig konflikt, skal vi være opmærksomme på, hvordan den eksisterer og opererer gennem et kontinuum af vold, hvordan konflikt er institutionaliseret og en strukturerende kraft i kvinders liv. Endeligt, sigter undersøgelsen efter at bidrage til regionale studier af Filippinerne gennem en bottom-up tilgang til separatistkonflikten, der tillader krydsfeltet mellem konflikt, separatisme, familier og kvinder at komme til syne.

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Pictures. All photographs included in this dissertation are my own.

SUMMARY

This dissertation explores what it means for women to live intimately with a violent, political conflict in the context of Muslim separatism in the Philippines. The study is based on 15 months of fieldwork between 2014 and 2018 in the settings of Mindanao, Manila and Palawan.The study argues that the women's possibilities, aspirations and capacities for action are shaped by the intimate entanglements of conflict, insurgency and kinship politics. Through analysis of the relational and gendered conditions, norms and commitments that the women fulfill, bargain and contest in various ways, the study provides insights into the creative, contradictory, and composite forms of agency through which they deal with and make a life possible within conflict and patriarchal familial structures. The dissertation makes a contribution to feminist international relations scholarship by suggesting new understandings of women's agency in contexts violent conflict and of conflict itself. The overall argument is that to understand a long-term violent conflict, we need to pay attention to how it exists within a continuum of violences, is institutionalized and a structuring force in the lives of women.

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