The clan politics of ARMM

Ampatuans, web of kin warp Maguindanao polls

By Ed Lingao
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First of Three Parts

DATU HOFFER, Maguindanao – This municipality is just a kilometer or so from the capitol, but it barely looks like a town. Bereft of any paved roads, it has a scattering of huts around hillsides. There is no town center, no business and commercial establishments, and the municipal hall sits alone on a hilltop – gleaming white cement and grey granite, obviously new, yet seemingly unused. There is no activity that one would associate with the governance of any regular municipality.

That's because as far as the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) is concerned, Datu Hoffer is one of many newly minted towns of Maguindanao in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that should not even be called a town.

Datu Hoffer was created by the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly in 2009 by virtue of Muslim Mindanao Act 220, with a population of 22,000. But DBM has refused to release any internal revenue allotment (IRA) for Datu Hoffer and nine more towns in Maguindanao because their populations fall below the 25,000 residents required by the DBM to qualify for IRA.

In other words, the municipal government of Datu Hoffer gets no revenues from the national government, and has to subsist on whatever taxes or revenues it can raise by itself from the smattering of homes on the hillsides surrounding the town hall.

Yet the upcoming elections will see an all-out battle among members of the Ampatuan clan over Datu Hoffer, where among the few means of livelihood is "professional evacuation," or living off relief goods.

Ampatuan lair

Incumbent Mayor Johaira "BongBong" Midtimbang Ampatuan, is running for a second term under the opposition Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-LABAN). Ampatuan is the wife of Zaldy Uy Ampatuan, the former Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and one of the co-accused in the 2009 Maguindanao Massacre.

Running against Johaira is a distant relative, Liberal Party (LP) bet Yamashita Mangacop, who says he is related to both the Ampatuans and their main political rival, the Mangudadatus.

Ampatuans are also running against each other for the position of vice mayor: Johaira's daughter Nor-Aila Ampatuan is also running under the PDP-Laban, while Mhurphy Ampatuan is running under the LP slate. Mhurphy is a second cousin of Johaira's husband, Zaldy.

For some, it is a paradox why members of just one clan would fight over a backward municipality that is barely as big as a barangay, with no infrastructure to begin with, and with no IRA to support it. Yet the scene is replicated in many other parts of Maguindanao, the second poorest of the 80 provinces in the Philippines, and one long ruled with an iron fist by a family that has extended its influence well beyond the boundaries of Central Mindanao.

To a lesser degree, it is also replicated elsewhere in the Philippines, where families are poised to take over every corner of what they see as their "territory," from barangay level and even up to the halls of Congress.

The race for positions is not just a race to capture any potential resources due the local government such as the IRA. Especially in Maguindanao, more than anything, it is to capture the most basic resource of any community, that one resource that gives any datu or sultan his real source of power, prestige before his peers, and legitimacy in politics: his constituency or his following.

Royal right to rule?

The datu system that distinguishes Muslim Mindanao politics from that of the rest of the country continues to serve as a historical and cultural touchstone of the many clans that claim royal blood and accordingly the right to rule. But Ishak Mastura, former ARMM trade secretary and a member of one of the major royal families of Maguindanao, clarifies, "The datu cannot be a datu without a following. If you say you are a datu, are you just a datu by blood or by lineage? But if you have no following, then you are a very minor datu, you are a footnote datu."

The significance of the following grows exponentially every three years, when local governments hold elections, and every six years, when national leaders cast their nets wide looking for local leaders who can bring in the numbers needed to swing the national vote.

In Maguindanao, this was best shown during 2004 and 2007, when Andal Ampatuan Sr. guaranteed then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her senatorial lineup magnificent electoral margins in the province to offset the popularity of her rival.

In 2004, Arroyo received statistically improbable numbers in Maguindanao. In at least two towns in the province, Arroyo won all the votes cast in the election, while the hugely popular Fernando Poe Jr. got zero votes. Andal Sr. had also promised a 12-0 sweep for Arroyo's senatorial lineup, and he delivered.

In return, the Arroyo administration endorsed the rule of the clan whenever its interests intersected with that of the government in power. In doing so, Manila allowed clan politics and clan dynamics to become a necessary part of the relationship between the local families and the national government leadership. This in turn led to the erosion of governance institutions that

should have empowered constituencies, enriched debate, and leveled the playing field for new ideas and new personalities.

Stats outlier

Indeed, it has come to a point in which clans vie for elected positions, not so much to govern areas but to command both manpower and resources with which to gather the votes for Manila. The after effects of this cycle can still be felt now: a free-for-all where clan members battle each other or rival clans for both the political and financial spoils in areas where governance and checks and balance have long been compromised or weakened by these same clans.

To partly understand how the Ampatuan patriarch – now in detention as one of the accused in the 2009 Maguindanao Massacre – may have fulfilled his promise to Arroyo, one can take a look at the town of Shariff Aguak, a third-class municipality that is also the capital of Maguindanao province.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO), Shariff Aguak had 34,376 residents as of 2010, when the NSO last conducted a census. Yet in the 2010 elections, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) reported that the town had 33,684 registered voters. If these official numbers are accurate, this means that of the entire population of Shariff Aguak, only 692 people were not eligible to vote. The other 97.9 percent of the population, apparently all infused with civic duty, are duly registered voters; practically all of them also turn out for elections as evidenced by Maguindanao's unusually high voter turnout of 97.6 percent.

The town's voters, however, may have little choice regarding the individuals they can put into local posts. For the May 2013 elections, 21 candidates with the surname Ampatuan are running for public office in Shariff Aguak. Three of the four mayoralty candidates are Ampatuans: Zahara Ampatuan (Partido ng Masang Pilipino, or PMP), Sarip Ampatuan (LP), and Rowella Ampatuan (Ind). Two of the vice mayoralty candidates are also Ampatuans: Marop Ampatuan (PMP), Mohamad Akmad Ampatuan (Ind). Of the 48 candidates running for a seat in the town council of Shariff Aguak, 17 candidates answer to the name Ampatuan.

Voters in excess

In adjacent Datu Unsay town, the situation is even more confounding: There are more registered voters in the town (13,584 voters in 2010, according to the Comelec) than there are people (12,490 residents, according to the 2010 NSO census). An Ampatuan is running for mayor, vice mayor, and councilor there as well.

"The Ampatuan clan is very large," says Johaira Ampatuan, explaining why it is inevitable that Ampatuans will run against each other in elections. "In 2010, there were a lot of us running, there were nine of us who are incumbent mayors."

In December 2012, the Commission on Elections delisted over 280,000 voters in ARMM or about a fifth of the region's previous total of 1.82 million voters in 2010. A new general

registration in July 2012 required the region's voters to re-register. Over 33,000 applicants were found to be minors while the other had registered multiple times at various precincts.

"In fact," she says, " in 2010, I did not have an opponent. It is only now that I have one. I would say that maybe he (Mangacop) is here to help me with my problem in Datu Hoffer, and for that I thank him."

Mangacop himself tells PCIJ, "You know, here in Maguindanao, it's just not possible for relatives not to end up running against one another."

He also says there are three requirements for a candidate to win in Maguindanao: "A strong candidate; secondly, an influential candidate; and lastly, he belongs to a family of the people."

Then he adds, almost as an afterthought, "Perhaps it is the platform that our people should be looking at."

Connected clans

For sure, though, Maguindanao has other clans of power, aside from the Ampatuans. In fact, Comelec's official list of candidates for the 2013 elections reads like a who's who of Maguindanao's royal families, although the Ampatuans still top the roster, with 73 people carrying Ampatuan as their middle or last name.

They are followed by the Midtimbangs and the Sangkis who are related by marriage to the Ampatuans, with 21 and 19 candidates respectively; and the Mangugdadatus, the foremost rival of the Ampatuans in the 2010 elections, with their own team of 17 candidates. Also with 17 candidates are the Sinsuats; 12 for the Matalams; 11 for the Pendatuns, and eight for the Masturas.

In some towns, clansmen are running against fellow clansmen, some because of differences in governance styles, others because of differences in personal interests; still others, because of the need to increase the probability that the position still goes a fellow who shares your last name and your royal heritage. Consider:

- In Ampatuan town, eight Sangkis and three Ampatuans are running for elective positions, from mayor to town councilor: Johaira Sangki Biruar (Ind), Datu Rasul Sangki (LP), Suraida Ampatuan Mamaluba (PMP) for mayor; Racma Sangki Druz (Ind), Samnon Mamasabang Sangki (LP) for vice mayor; five more Sangkis and two Ampatuans are running for seats in the town council.

- In Datu Abdullah Sangki, six Sangkis are running for the town council, aside from the three Sangkis who are running for mayor and vice mayor.

- Buluan town, the bailiwick of the Mangudadatus, has eight Mangudadatus running, including Ibrahim Gaguil Mangudadatu (ind), Lorena Dingcong Mangudadatu (LP) for

mayor; King Jhazzer Tiamson Mangudadatu (LP) for vice mayor. Five other Mangudadatus are running for a seat in the town council.

¶ In Datu Blah Sinsuat town, three SInsuats are running for mayor: Datu Ibrahim Sinsuat (Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan, or PDP-LABAN), Datu Marshall Sinsuat (LP), and Haakon Sinsuat (KBL). Four other Sinsuats are running for the town council.

¶ In Mamasapano town, also a bailiwick of the Ampatuan clan, four of the six mayoralty candidates are Ampatuans: Norodin Ampatuan (LP), Rebecca Ampatuan (Ind), Tahirodin Benzar Ampatuan (PDP-LABAN), and Saddan Hussein Ampatuan (Ind).

¶ In the same town, three of the four vice mayoral candidates are also Ampatuans: Alonto Ampatuan (Ind), Mahir Ampatuan (PDP-LABAN), and Nuali Ampatuan (Ind). Seven Ampatuans are also running for the town council.

Unopposed bets

In other towns across Maguindanao, senior clan members or the newly anointed younger generation already have guaranteed seats, since they are running unopposed for mayor or vice mayor. Many of these candidates even carry the same names of the towns they wish to represent, since the town was either named after their ancestors, or in some cases, after them. They include:

¶ Nathaniel Sangacala Midtimbang and Ebrahim Musa Midtimbang are running unopposed for mayor and vice mayor respectively of Datu Anggal Midtimbang town, also under the PDP-LABAN.

¶ In Talayan town, the bailiwick of the Midtimbang clan, Tungkang Anggal Midtimbang and Sukarno Musa Midtimbang are running unopposed for mayor and vice mayor respectively under the banner of the PDP-LABAN.

¶ In Datu Odin Sinsuat, Datu Ombra Quesada Sinsuat and Sajid Seismundo Sinsuat are running unopposed for mayor and vice mayor under the Liberal Party.

¶ In Datu Paglas town, Mohamad Pendatun Paglas and Mohammed Yusseef Powers Paglas are also running without opponents under the LP banner.

¶ And in Upi, Ramon Piang is running unopposed for mayor under the Liberal Party.

Outsiders, however, are especially surprised over the continuing presence of the Ampatuans in Maguindanao politics, considering the controversy that has surrounded the clan's most well-known members. In truth, when PCIJ last November released a story identifying the national political parties that have included Ampatuan clan members in their slates, there was a general outcry from both the administration and the opposition parties.

Both the administration Liberal Party and the opposition United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) bristled at the insinuation that there were any Ampatuans within their ranks. LP chairman

Franklin Drilon immediately ordered that all Ampatuans in the LP slate be taken off the list. UNA secretary general Toby Tiangco for his part chose to split hairs by saying that the opposition alliance did not endorse any Ampatuans, although the two member-parties may have done so at the local level.

When confronted with data from the Comelec that showed that nine Ampatuans were running under the LP banner, and 34 under UNA's PMP and PDP-LABAN, both then stressed that not all Ampatuans subscribed to the rule of former Maguindanao Governor Andal Ampatuan Sr., the clan patriarch who is accused of masterminding the 2009 Maguindanao massacre.

'For new politics'

Governor Esmael Mangudadatu, LP chairman for Maguindanao, says the Ampatuans in his slate subscribed to a new form of politics different from Andal Sr.'s. UNA's Tiangco for his part said he sees no problem endorsing the wives of the Maguindanao massacre suspects, since they are not the ones facing multiple murder charges.

To be fair, not every clan member is necessarily cast from the same mold, or stays with the same shape he or she is born with. "We have to understand that the Ampatuans are a big family or clan," says Mussolini Lidasan, director of the Al Qalam Institute, the research arm of the Ateneo de Davao University and an active member of several Moro civil society organizations. "They are not all similar in terms of principles or even support the style of Datu Andal Ampatuan."

"You can count the number of people who obeyed Andal Sr. like his sons who committed atrocities," Mangudadatu says, in defense of his provincial line-up. "But there are Ampatuans who are good."

He even notes that a brother of provincial board member Yasser Ampatuan (a nephew of Andal Sr.) was shot dead by the old man himself because of a political rivalry in the late '80s. Yasser is vying for another term on the board under the LP.

But an interview with Yasser and Sarip Ampatuan, another May 2013 polls candidate, presents a mixed picture of practical politics heavily nuanced with clan culture.

Both reveal that they were close allies of Andal Sr. in the Lakas party when the latter still reigned over Maguindanao; in fact, Yasser says that he would be appointed by Andal Sr. as OIC governor of Maguindanao whenever the patriarch left for another country because "Datu Andal had full trust in me."

"That is why he knows me well, and I know him," he says. "Perhaps he saw that I am a good person and that when it comes to work, I really work."

Just in-laws

"What I saw based on what he was doing was that Datu Andal was a very good leader," says Sarip, who is Andal Sr.'s half-brother. " But his sons did not deserve to lead. That is what destroyed him."

Sarip will be running against Zahara Ampatuan, Andal Sr.'s daughter-in-law, in the Shariff Aguak mayoralty race this May. "I thought of running for mayor of Shariff Aguak," he says, "because I think that in our town, in our area, now that Datu Andal and his sons are no longer there, we cannot accept that someone else is leading our town aside from our family."

"Zahara is different, she is an in-law," he says, when it is pointed out that he will be up against a fellow Ampatuan. "She is the wife of (Anwar) and an in-law of Datu Sr., and we cannot accept that Zahara is our mayor."

Naguib Sinarimbo, a human rights lawyer and a former ARMM executive secretary, meanwhile says that it was not unexpected that the Ampatuans would seek alliances with national parties, even opposing parties.

"Their hold on power is still there, and it's still strong," says Sinarimbo. "They would be a force to reckon with in the 2013 elections. You would see for instance alliances being formed with their group and some other politicians. Maybe they will not venture into directly participating in the provincial or regional elections but they would still be courted by politicians in the province and even by national candidates because they still deliver the votes."

According to Bobby Taguntong, Maguindanao coordinator for the nongovernment organization Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reforms, local polls in clan areas have little to do with party politics and platforms. Rather, parties try to woo local candidates who can bring in the needed votes on the national level.

"Political parties are not part of the discussions here," says Taguntong. "We are talking here of who you are, and who wants to run for election. This was never about parties." ***– PCIJ, April 2013***

The Clan Politics of ARMM

Maguindanao's misery: Absentee officials, absence of rage, poverty

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Second of Three Parts

FOR A PROVINCE that is only turning 40 years old this year, Maguindanao has managed to emerge as "the most governed," if only by the number of governance structures physically erected for the province. In the last four decades, the provincial capitol has moved a total of six times to five different places in four decades, depending on the whims of the newly elected governor.

When Maguindanao province was spun off from the greater Cotabato empire province in 1973, the first governor, Simeon Datumanong, held office in Limpongo, in what is now Datu Hoffer town. His successor, Zacaria Candao, held office on PC Hill in Cotabato City before resigning in 1977. The replacement governor, Datu Sanggacala Baraguir of Sultan Kudarat town, naturally wanted the capitol in his bailiwick, and had a new capitol built in Sultan Kudarat. The fourth governor, Sandiale Sambolawan, returned the provincial government to Shariff Aguak.

Then Datu Andal Salibo Ampatuan Sr. was elected governor in May 2001. He built a grand columned capitol almost right beside the municipal hall of Shariff Aguak, where he used to hold office as mayor. A few years later, Andal Sr. would build a new and even more opulent provincial capitol, complete with a driveway that rivals a small EDSA flyover and a private toilet that houses a Jacuzzi, a stone's throw away from the old capitol, on land that is rumored to be his own.

After the 2010 elections, Esmael Mangudadatu, the current governor who succeeded Andal Sr., moved the provincial capitol to his hometown of Buluan, accessible from Maguindanao only if one passes through Sultan Kudarat province first. At first Mangudadatu referred to the new capitol as the Satellite Office of the Provincial Government. Later, to avoid complications and questions, he renamed the place as the Maguindanao Peace Center.

Capitol on wheels?

"The problem we have observed in Maguindanao is the new Governor always transfers the provincial capitol," says Bobby Taguntong, Maguindanao spokesman for the Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reform or CCARE, a civil society group pushing for reforms in the election process in Mindanao. "Maybe we can suggest to the national government to make the provincial capitol mobile, perhaps even install tires."

It is far more than an issue of confusion and inconvenience for those who need to conduct business in the capitol, wherever it may be relocated to next. Rather, the tale of the moving capitol symbolizes a bigger problem seen in places where governance is more personal than political, where families overrule political parties, and where blood trumps ideas and ideologies.

In Maguindanao, as well in many other places where old families hold sway, governance is defined not by political institutions but by the politics of personality; in this case, personalities whose roots go deep into the bedrock of local history and tradition: the political clans. In these places, the centers of power are not the institutions of governance and democracy such as the local government units; the power instead emanates from the local families that inevitably head these LGUs. As such, a governor or town mayor may see no need or obligation to go to the capitol or the town hall. Rather, the capitol comes to him.

Taguntong sees this replicated in many of the 36 towns of Maguindanao, where local officials no longer bother to report for work. If anything needs to be done, official business is brought to him at his residence. The residence becomes the de facto town hall where the local official holds court.

"Some say there is poor governance here," remarks Taguntong. "But my conclusion is that governance here is not only poor, it is absent."

Empty edifices

A cursory check of municipal halls strewn along the Cotabato-Isulan highway seems to confirm this. Some of the municipal halls are impressively built but seem largely empty except for a skeleton staff of municipal employees who need to punch their timecards.

In Datu Unsay town, the municipal hall is modern and magnificent, yet there is little activity going on inside. The mayor is Reshal Ampatuan, wife of former Mayor Andal Ampatuan Jr. who is now in detention as a primary suspect in the 2009 Maguindanao massacre.

The same goes for the capital town of Shariff Aguak, now ruled by Zahara Ampatuan, wife of Anwar Sr., where the offices seem largely empty except for some rank and file employees. The municipal hall of the newly created town of Datu Hoffer, meantime, is even more impressive, standing like a shining white beacon on a hill and clearly so close and visible from nearby Shariff Aguak. But it is practically non-functional, its walls bright and spotless from disuse even though the mayor is Johaira 'Bongbong' Ampatuan, wife of former ARMM Governor Zaldy Ampatuan.

In all these town halls, municipal officers such as the mayors and vice mayors seldom come to work, and the town council is practically non-existent.

Absentee execs

"How many municipalities implement the barangay assembly?" asks Taguntong. "Has any municipality here formed a municipal peace and order council?"

"Let us not be hypocrites," he says. "There are municipal halls here that do not have any offices during office hours. How will a town develop if the public servants do not report for work, or do not govern?"

Taguntong says PCIJ was fortunate to find employees still manning their posts despite the absence of their elective officials. In other municipalities off the beaten path or off the national highway, says Taguntong, even the civil servants do not bother to report for work.

There are more scientific indicators used by the government to gauge the performance of local government units. The National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) uses the Good Governance Index or GGI as a way to measure the responsiveness of local governments to the governance needs of constituents on three levels: economic, political, and administrative.

The economic governance index measures how responsive a local government unit is in providing economic opportunities for a constituency to grow and develop economically; political governance index relates to how an LGU effectively empowers a citizen to have a say in the governance of his community; lastly, administrative governance is how an LGU delivers basic public services such as health, education, and peace and order.

Cellar dweller

In the NSCB's GGI ranking in both 2005 and 2008, Maguindanao placed last among all the 79 provinces then in existence in the country, meaning it performed the worst as far as good governance indicators are concerned. For example, poverty incidence registered at 48.50 percent in 2005, going slightly down to 47.62 percent in 2008, and then 44.6 percent in 2009. This means almost half of the Maguindanaoan population lives below the poverty line, roughly double the national poverty incidence that played between 25-26.5 percent from 2003 to 2009.

The per capita purchasing power of Maguindanaoans also paled in comparison to the rest of the country. Real per capita income in Benguet is the highest at P 80,000, followed by Batanes at P 78,300. Maguindanaoans had only a fourth of the purchasing power of people from Benguet, with an annual per capital income of P 23,700. The NSCB says the purchasing power of the top five provinces in the country is almost three times more than the per capita purchasing power of the bottom five provinces, Maguindanao being one of them.

For the administrative governance index, Maguindanao does not fare any better. There were only 59 health personnel on average serving every 1,000 residents in 2005, going down to 38 health personnel per 1,000 Maguindanaoans in 2008. Phone density, or the number of telephones per 1,000 residents, was 9.24 phones in 2005, going up to only 27.98 phones in 2008

Another measure used by government in assessing social development in an area is the human development index or HDI. Unfortunately for Maguindanaoans, they fare no better with this other measurement.

Short life expectancy

In the 2009 provincial human development index released by the NSCB last year, Maguindanaoans have a life expectancy that was third shortest for all the provinces in the Philippines. Maguindanaoans have a life expectancy of only 58.5 years, just slightly better than

Sulu with 56.8 years and Tawi-Tawi with 53.6 years. That means Maguindanaoans on the average die ten years earlier than the average Filipino, whose life expectancy is 68.7 years. Filipinos from La Union have the longest life expectancy of 76.4 years, or 18 years longer than Maguindanaoans.

Also, adult Maguindanaoans are lucky to have an average of 6.3 years of schooling, the fourth lowest in the country, and three years less than the national average of 8.9 years. This is in contrast to people from batanes who have 11.5 years of schooling on the average.

Surprisingly, it is in the political governance index where Maguindanao appears to have had some positive indicators, although for reasons that may have little to do with good governance. The crime solution efficiency rate, or the percentage of reported crimes that were solved by the local police, was tagged at 85.27 percent. It is a surprising figure for a province known for violence and the proliferation of firearms, until one realizes that most crimes go unreported in the province.

Even more surprising is the voter turnout rate, which remained steady at 97.66 percent, meaning almost all of Maguindanao's registered voters eagerly cast their ballots in the 2004 and 2007 elections. It is worth noting that Maguindanao was the center of election controversy, after then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and former Governor Datu Andal Ampatuan Sr. were accused of manipulating election results to deliver swing votes in favor of administration candidates both in 2004 and 2007.

IRA black hole

With its abject poverty, one would think that Maguindanao was one of the least supported provinces in terms of the allocation of resources.

Yet the internal revenue allotments that have poured into the province tell a different tale. In 2011, the national government poured in P 3.87 billion pesos in IRA into Maguindanao: P1.16 billion for the provincial government, P1.9 billion for the 36 municipalities, and P711 million for the barangays. The total dipped to P3.7 billion in 2012 and P3.4 billion in 2013, following findings by the National Statistics Office that the previous population figures for Maguindanao appeared to be bloated.

In comparison, provinces that have received similar amounts of IRA seem far developed compared to Maguindanao. Ilocos Norte received P2.7 billion in IRA in 2011; Ilocos Sur got P3.1 billion; Nueva Vizcaya P2 billion; Bataan P2.1 billion, Tarlac P3.7 billion; Zambales P2.5 billion; and Oriental Mindoro P2.9 billion.

Clearly, funds were pouring into what appears to be a giant black hole.

Indeed, economic and political activity appear to be at a standstill in many Maguindanao towns on regular days. Town centers are often devoid of people, except in the late afternoon when children get off from school and public servants clock out of work. The public market and public utility terminal of Datu Unsay is barely used, and many of the stalls are vacant. In Shariff Aguak,

the capitol town, most of the economic activity is centered around the small rotunda across the public square, where a few hardware stores and copra and grain dealers are located.

Only 2 banks

A good indication of economic activity, or the lack of it, would be the number of banks located in Maguindanao itself. In 2009, the National Statistics Office (NSO) reported that the number of banks in Maguindanao had doubled in the past year. This is because Maguindanao only had one bank serving the vast province in 2008; in 2009, the Land Bank of the Philippines, a government bank that handles most government transactions, opened a second branch.

The dire statistics raise a confounding question: If governance in the province is ineffectual, or even non-existent, how then are the ruling political families able to continue to exercise control over the population? Is the lack of development and governance tied to the rule of the political clans in the area? Is the province poor because of the political clans, or are the political clans strong because of the poverty in Maguindanao?

Some things are clear at the outset: in many clan areas, the clan dictates who runs for public office. In these areas, the command vote still reigns supreme. Consequently, the choices open to the voter are limited by the willingness of the clan to expand the field it has traditionally dominated to other entrants in the political arena.

The problem is compounded by the apparent lack or unwillingness of the clans to exercise actual governance of the areas that they had fenced off for themselves. Apparently, such a clan prefers to lead instead of governing, and command instead of administering.

Clan selects mayors

Several primary grade schoolteachers who hitched a ride with PCIJ along the Cotabato-Isulan highway spoke of how the senior clan members of their town simply select the next town mayor from among themselves. That candidate would then almost certainly run unopposed after the clan has announced his selection.

Generally, the clan gets its way. Conflict only arises when another clan decides to contest the seat, as is what happened between the Ampatuan and Mangudadatu families in 2009 that led to the Maguindanao massacre. When a conflict arises, the clan with the support of the biggest patron in Manila often wins.

It is a tragic situation that is made worse by the apparent apathy or sense of submission by their constituents to the interest of the clan. It is the tragedy of missed opportunities and extremely low expectations.

Comments Taguntong: “The mindset of people here is, I will not go anymore to the voting precinct, because even if I do not go, someone will vote for me anyway.” ***– PCIJ, April 2013***

"They feel that whatever they do, the result will be the same," says human-rights lawyer Naguib Sinarimbo, who was once the executive secretary of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. "As for others, they sell their votes because at least it is one way of getting cash. That is the only benefit they will ever get from their leaders."

A recent study on political dynasties by the Asian Institute of Management Policy Center is revealing in that it demonstrates a link between poverty and the prevalence of political dynasties in an area. According to the Center's director, Ronald Mendoza, the study indicates that higher poverty incidence increases the chance for dynasties "to grow and dominate the political positions" of an area such as Maguindanao.

"There seems to be strong positive evidence that if you have more poverty, the chances are you will have more 'fat dynasties,'" Mendoza said.

"Fat dynasties," he explains, refer to political dynasties that expand sideways to occupy multiple elective positions for a certain period of time. This type of dynasty, which Mendoza says is increasing in number, is an evolution of the thinner variety where an elective position is merely handed over from one relative to another.

Fattest dynasty

Mendoza says that in Maguindanao, the Ampatuans are the fattest dynasty of all, holding 16 out of the 54 elective positions held by members of political clans after the 2010 elections. The Ampatuans are followed by the Midtimbangs, with whom they are related by marriage, with seven positions, and then the Ampatuans' rival, the Mangudadatus with five positions.

In the case of a fat dynasty that is in Maguindanao, Mendoza says that there are potentially two failures: "One is, is the power to choose who should be the leader of a municipality still with the people? If the dynasty is fat, it has a lot of resources in its grip, and there is a lot more power that it can apply to that jurisdiction. So you begin to wonder, where is power residing? Is it still in the electorate, or in the dynasty that has entrenched itself?"

Continues Mendoza: "The second potential failure in terms of governance and democracy is, if you are all related, will you still exert the same checks and balances in the system? If the mayor sees that his dad the governor is doing something wrong, would he be able to tell his father off?"

"The saying is a cliché, that blood is thicker than water," says Mendoza. "But in many places the party system is so weak that what they replace with the party system is a family-oriented system where family members are invited into power. Some of them are trying to rationalize it by saying they are helping each other out to govern a region. But even if they are the cleanest leaders around, there is an awkwardness to it."

Voters corrupted?

For all the problems that political clans and dynasties bring up, however, the most alarming is the impact they have in shaping the point of view of the constituency, the people they are supposed

to serve. Malang says that more and more communities now measure their appreciation of their clan leaders in terms of who oppresses them less, instead of who serves them more. It is the ultimate corruption of the concept of the public servant.

"It is so tragic and sad, that our expectations of our leaders is already this low, that we no longer expect them to perform well," says Zainudin Malang, director of the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center based in Cotabato, and himself a member of a political clan. "We just expect them not to do anything really terrible, and that is already fine with us. For us, they may steal the money of the people, and that is still fine, so long as they do not stead my carabao, or grab my farm."

"The social contract has been distorted and corrupted." Malang says. "People now have a different understanding of that social contract. Even the voter has been corrupted."

Sinarimbo also asserts, "Governance is inefficient because you don't have accountability. What is the skill you need? You need to be able to drink coffee in Manila and talk to national officials. That is the only skill you need. You do not have to be in conflict areas or flooded areas or know the needs of your constituency. The only skill you need is to be able to drink coffee with the people in Manila, and you are sure that you will be in power."

In the end, says Sinarimbo, it is the central government that has the burden of providing the avenue for people to express their real desires, whether through elections, through mass media, or any other form, regardless of the interests of the clans who govern them. After all, it was the state, which cloaked the clans with its own brand of legitimacy; it should also be the state, through its institutions of national governance that must return the power of the clans to the people.

Says Sinarimbo: "There is no manifest expression of outrage, even though the people can see the disparity between the huge mansions (of their leaders) and their own tiny shanties. The people know there is something wrong with the setup. But the ability and the willingness to express this manifestly is not there. There is no sense of security that assures me that if I do this, the state will be there to secure my right to express. So long as the state is unable to provide that, we will not see any significant changes in this system in the immediate future." ***– PCIJ, April 2013***

The Clan Politics of ARMM

Nat'l politicos prop dynasties as surrogates to win elections

By Ed Lingao
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
Last of Three Parts

PRESIDENT BENIGNO Simeon C. Aquino III may have taken to publicly scolding septuagenarian Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III over the latter's role in the Sabah misadventure, but when Manila was still a marshland, the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao were already thriving political and economic centers in the region. Unlike the clans in Luzon and the Visayas who trace their roots to their economic base in the area, the clans in Moro areas have deeper historical and religious roots.

"The clans have played an important role in pre-republic history," says Mussolini Lidasan, director of the Al Qalam Institute, the research arm of the Ateneo de Davao University and an active member of Moro civil society organizations. "The datu system is one of the oldest potent institutions in Southern Philippines."

Indeed, the datu system, an ancient political and social structure that has defined much of the history of the southern Philippines, provides continuity between a proud past and the tumultuous present. Yet it is one that has radically evolved, some would even say corrupted, into what many outsiders now perceive to be a system of patronage, corruption, inefficiency, and ruthlessness, especially in Maguindanao. As a result, the clans it has produced in the province are now perceived by many as the poster children of the worst kind of political dynasties.

Obviously, that was not how the way the system had been set up. Lidasan, himself a member of several royal-political clans, including the Sinsuats and the Balabarans., says, "A datu or sultan is believed to be a descendant of the Prophet and because of this, he is a traditional and a religious leader."

Reciprocal ties

The historian William Henry Scott noted that the in the past, datus appeared to have a somewhat reciprocal relationship with their constituents: "The datu's power stems from the willingness of his followers to render him respect and material support, to accept and implement his decisions, and to obey and enforce his orders, and is limited by the consensus of his peers. Followers give their support in response to his ability and willingness to use his power on their behalf, to make material gifts or loans in time of crisis, and to provide legal or police protection and support against opponents."

People needed datus then, in the same way that datus needed people to lead, says Ishak Mastura, a descendant of Sultan Mastura, and a member of one of the major royal families of Maguindanao. "If you are a datu, you have a following. You combine yourselves so you have protection, so you are stronger, if another clan or another group attacks you."

He also says, “In the history of Maguindanao, it is always those who can gather the most number of people under his leadership who are the most important ones. It means the relationship is symbiotic. It cannot just be one way.”

Naguib Sinarimbo, a human-rights lawyer and a descendant as well of several political families in Maguindanao, says structures were put in place to allow for a kind of checks and balances of a datu’s rule.

In Maguindanao, a datu would have an *atas bichara*, or a consultative assembly composed of representatives of the principalities. There is also the *luwaran*, or the written law of the land. “*Paluwaran* in Maguidnanao defines the structure of society and the obligations of citizens, the sultan, or the datu,” Sinarimbo says. “The monarch does not have absolute rule in the Maguindanao setting.”

Had slaves ’til 1986

A datu or any royalty for that matter, however, still retains privileges not made available to ordinary citizens. In many ways, the sense of entitlement carries over to the present day.

“In our place, we own one barangay,” says Ali Macabalang, a local journalist who is linked by blood and marriage to the Adiong and Alonto clans. “It was a sign of royalty if you had slaves. I remember we had seven slaves at home.” Macabalang said he set free his last slave only in 1986.

“It also depends on the history of the clan,” he adds. “There are clans here who just played with the people. Just for fun, they would remove the kneecaps of the people, and make them dance like they were geese.”

Macabalang is referring to Datu Uttoh, a Maguindanaoan royal from the last century who reportedly had a proclivity for having the kneecaps of his enemies crushed before having them thrown under his house to live with the family animals.

But if the datu system worked relatively well enough for four centuries, what was it that happened in the last century that has led to the popular perception of Maguindanao clans as royalty who have lost touch with their base, or worse, warlords and politicians who rule with ruthlessness and utter disregard for their constituents?

“Datus reflect the feudalistic nature of our institutions,” offers Lidasan. “Hence the datus reinvent themselves from time to time, making sure that their interest, the clan’s interest is maintained and preserved.”

For sure, like all social structures, the datu system has evolved over the centuries to its present day form. In the Maguindanao context, the role of an emerging central authority in Manila is said to have had a major influence in the progression – some would say regression – of the clan system of Maguindanao.

Sinarimbo says both the Spanish and American invaders tried to quell rebellion in the region by selecting the more cooperative clans, arming them, and playing them against other families.

Surrogates & clans

"When the Americans came in, they wanted a control, a surrogate inside the Moro community," he says. "Some of the influential clans were built, others were neutralized."

Sinarimbo cites the case of the rebellious Datu Ali during the American period. "His family was deliberately obliterated by the Americans to give way to some other clans. Because he fought against the Americans, the Americans did everything to prevent his rising power and supported other clans.

"Foreigners introduced a type of government not acceptable to the Bangsamoro setting, but acceptable to the black sheep of the families who can take advantage of their offer," says Taguntong. "Sometimes, the black sheep of the clan are used against their fellow Moros.)

The impact of this went deeper than just inter-clan jockeying for the spoils from Manila; the new ruling clans would still wield enormous power and influence granted them by the datu system over their constituents, but without the accountability. They were, after all, really accountable to their main sponsor in Manila.

It is, unfortunately, a process that was continued by Manila until today as exemplified by the preeminence of the clan led b y Datu Andal Ampatuan Sr. in Maguindanao.

Then in 1935, the Commonwealth government headed by Manuel L. Quezon stripped sultans and datus of many of the traditional powers and authority that they had held for centuries. The Director for Non-Christian tribes issued a directive preventing the datus from trying and adjudicating cases in the community level.

Reinvented clans

"When our government in 1935 removed the functions of the datus and sultans, these people then re-reinvented themselves from datus to mayors, governors, et cetera," says Lidasan. "Thus, the datuism and local governance were mixed together, having a hybrid function which is prone to corruption and abuses when they are not properly defined. (Royalty), with all its attendant power and influence over the constituency, found a new outlet in politics.

Current events only served to reinforce the new system of patronage. With the outbreak of the Moro rebellion in the 1970s, Manila again had to select clan members who could tame their other rebellious peers.

"The conflicts forced the national government to introduce its own set of datus which may not necessarily be the datu of choice of the communities," says Zainudin Malang, director of the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center based in Cotabato, and himself a member of a political clan.

He explains, “If you were sitting in Camp Aguinaldo or Malacanang, you’d think, how do you neutralize this? You find someone else in the clan who is willing to be coopted. These are big clans – who will be able to find someone there who is willing to toe the line.”

“That is nothing new in any internal insurgency,” he adds. “Always, the national government will find someone in that community to become its surrogate.”

“You would not expect one clan to kill the member of another clan,” remarks Sinarimbo. “They will be afraid of retaliation. So there is a deterrent effect. But when the state adds on the instruments of violence to just one clan by favoring it, the chance of violence and abuse is greater because that clan can access all that.”

“When central government sponsors local politicians,” he continues, “the danger is always there because your surrogate will build his own infrastructure. So even if there is no legitimacy from the population, he will build a structure that will enable him to be in control.”

Mindsets within the clans also changed as the institution evolved. Royal stature translated to political power, which brought many attendant benefits.

Limited options

“Living in Maguindanao and being part of the political and traditional clans, you have very limited options in life,” observes Lidasan. “Either you engage in an agricultural business, join politics, or join the government and try to find ways to enrich yourself in doing so. Because of this paradigm, more often than not, families and close relatives fight one another just to enter politics, government, and even in business.”

“In other words,” he says, “we have a problem of seeing government functions, institutions, and organizations as a family enterprise. Thus, opportunities for development, bringing new ideas, and recognition and respect of human dignity are not factored in the mindset of our people.”

“Every clan needs to protect its honor and family name,” Lidasan says. “Thus, people defer to them because of fear and respect. Imagine a datu who is a member of the royalty has the mindset that he is a king or a prince. Thus, the internal revenue allotment is for their own disposal alone.”

Taguntong, for his part, says, “before, there was a sense of responsibility by the datu. But this sense of responsibility is gone, and only authority is left. The responsibility to the people is no more. That’s why we have the problem of corruption.”

At the height of the Moro rebellion in the 1970s, however, Andal Ampatuan Sr. was not yet pandering to Malacanang. According to Mastura, Andal Sr. also became a rebel like his grandfather. “Maybe Datu Andal was not a big commander of the Moro National Liberation Front,” Mastura says, “but he was known also as one of those who struggled against the government because their town of Ampatuan was one of the sites of the fiercest fights, especially Christian and Muslim fights.”

In 1987, Andal Sr. ran and won as mayor of Maganoy, now named Shariff Aguak. The year 2001 was another turning point for the Ampatuans, with Andal Sr. elected governor of Maguidanao. It is said that Andal had the backing of the military, because his main rival, Zacaria Candao, was widely perceived to be coddling to Moro Islamic Liberation Front. One of Andal Sr.'s sons, Zaldy Uy Ampatuan, took his place as mayor of Shariff Aguak.

Arroyo & Andal

In Manila, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was busy struggling to consolidate her position after ousting Joseph Estrada in the second People Power revolt. Hounded by questions of legitimacy, Arroyo was besieged by pro-Estrada supporters who rioted in front of Malacanang in May 2001. All in all, the time was ripe for the interests of Andal and Gloria Arroyo to intersect.

In the years that followed, Ampatuan carefully built his relationship with both military and political leaders on the regional and national levels. Mastura recalls that Ampatuan was largely successful in reuniting the feuding clans of Maguindanao under his wing, a move that was certain to catch the attention of Malacanang.

Retired Lt. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer, who served as martial law administrator of Maguindanao after the 2009 Maguindanao Massacre, acknowledges that the Ampatuan clan wielded an inordinate amount of influence on virtually all levels, even beyond the confines of Central Mindanao. It was a kind of clout that was unique to the Ampatuans, he says, and could not be seen with other political clans all over the Philippines.

"The clans were that powerful, to a point where they choose which battalion commander will be appointed there, or brigade commander," he says. "Or even division commander, they can make a special request to higher authority. They can show that if you do not cooperate they can call on people higher than you."

"The challenge to the commander is how to deal with the local politician," says Ferrer. "You are talking of the mayor, the governor, the regional governor, or even the barangay. They are all related."

For example, he says, the Ampatuans were allowed to form and arm 200 Special Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units Active Auxiliaries (SCAA), a special militia normally created to protect the interests of large businesses such as mining firms.

This is aside from the roughly 1,500 civilian volunteer organization (CVO) members that the Ampatuans were allowed to form to fight off the threat of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Maguindanao.

Big private army

Combined, the two forces effectively became a brigade-size private army of the Ampatuan clan. Says Ferrer: "The control was very loose in Maguindanao, there was no semblance of control. The clans were the ones deploying and assigning the military units."

"Their rule was absolute," Sarimbo says of the Ampatuans. "I have seen them rule Maguindanao and the region. They had direct access to Malacanang and nobody could say no to them because they had an exclusive line."

"In the beginning, he did some good by uniting the clans and making it less a contest in the elections where it is brother against brother, clan against clan, or family against family," Mastura says, referring to Andal Sr. "But in the end he may have tilted more towards relying on these clans than going to the grassroots."

"Malacanang was happy because this simplified control over ARMM," says Sinarimbo. "They only needed to talk to one man. If you want the delivery of votes, you talk to one man."

Concepts at a cross

Ironically, Ali Macabalang, the local journalist who also belongs to several prominent clans, asserts that datuism naturally runs into conflict with modern electoral processes, in that a candidate running for electoral post must sell himself to the voter.

"Elections are actually anathema to datuism," says Macabalang. "If you don't belong to this royal lineage, you do not have the say or the space in a democracy."

Malang, however, prefers to place datuism in the context of its role in the past. "In a sense, there is democracy, although the articulation of that democracy is indigenous," he says." It may not necessarily mirror the systems of the Americans, but just because it does not mirror that system does not mean that it is not democratic. There was accountability and legitimacy, and you could be held to account."

Former ARMM official Mastura meanwhile says, "These are older forms of social practice, maybe feudal forms going back to the barangay system, so that they legitimize power by having elections. But it is an older system of patronage politics, and the elections are just a way to express and make it legitimate in the eyes of the many."

"The datu system will never disappear," says Maguindanao Governor Esmael Mangudadatu, himself a member of the Buayan royalty and whose wife and sister were among those killed in the 2009 Maguindanao Massacre.

Mangudadatu thinks that people still need a link to their past, even if this link eventually evolves into one more social than political in nature. " For example," he says, "in our community, there is need for a datu like us. The one who took over my uncle Sultan Abdula Mangudadatu is the

youngest among the brothers. So he was enthroned, and that is made known to the whole province that he has been enthroned a sultan."

But many also agree on the need for the sacred traditions to evolve with the times. In the case of the datu system, Mastura and Lidasan acknowledge that this practice would inevitably have to adapt to the idea of democracy, even if it is in the western liberal democratic context.

Malaysia and Indonesia, countries with which many parts of Mindanao have more in common with than Manila, have a similar datu system dating back to the time when Islam was the common thread of the sultanates that predated the modern nation-states. Yet their datu system evolved in a different direction, with less of the problem of royalty-turned-political families that the Philippines has now.

Political officers

Lidasan thinks the difference arose from the different historical tracks that the Philippines and these other countries took. He notes, "President Manuel L. Quezson, in the 1935 Constitution, ensured that datuism will be prohibited. Thus, datuism was (perceived) to be corrupt. Instead of its religious function, the datu became a political officer."

And so, the Philippine datu entered Philippine politics. "In Malaysia and Indonesia, the datu are only symbolic powers," Lidasan says. "If they decide to join politics, then they have to waive their datu rights. But here in our country, a datu became a warlord."

Taguntong also recalls a time when datus were community leaders, akin to barangay captains, simple unpaid volunteers who were the rallying point of their communities. But when the barangays started receiving internal revenue allotments, and the position took on a more political tone, so did the datu system.

Lidasan offers a slightly different view: "People serve the datu. But a mayor or a public official, they serve the people."

"Imagine," he says, "the difference in that paradigm and mindset." ***– PCIJ, April 2013***

SIDEBAR, PART 1

The ties that bind

By Karol Anne Ilagan
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

A SPIDER couldn't have spun a more complicated network: the diagram before you shows blood and affinal lines that link the Ampatuans to the Sangkis and Mangudadatus, Midtimbangs, Sinsuats, Dilangalens, Datumanongs and Hatamans, and the Semas. This network of political families is spread all over Maguindanao, and even reaches the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and Basilan.

And yet the diagram, which is based largely on available information, is by no means complete. To put it together, PCIJ looked at data enrolled in the Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALN) filed by officials who are required in law to declare their relatives within the fourth degree of consanguinity and/or affinity working in government, Certificates of Candidacy that provide information about a candidate's spouse, and Personal Data Sheets which list details of the spouse, children, and parents of an official.

To verify positions and relations, PCIJ also used official records of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). In addition, it referred to various news reports published by *MindaNews*, gmanews.tv, inquirer.net, and manilatimes.net.

We begin with Ampatuan patriarch Andal Sr., who has six wives and about 40 children. At least 11 of his children are identified in various public documents and news reports: Saudi, Rebecca, Kagi Nuria, Zaldy, Anwar, Hoffer, Andal Jr., Aloha, Sajid, Shaydee, and Galema. Two sons, Saudi and Hoffer, have passed away.

Three of Andal Sr.'s children (Zaldy, Hoffer, and Sajid) and two of his grandsons (Bahnarin, son of Rebecca and Akmad M. Ampatuan Sr. and Datu Amer Hussein or Jeng, son of Shaydee and Datu Salih Nasution P. Macapendeg) are married to members of other political families in Maguindanao.

In all, public office in the 36 towns of Maguindanao is held by over a dozen families, majority of which are bound either by blood or marriage. At least eight other political families were traced to be directly connected to or associated with the Ampatuans.

Ampatuan-Sangki-Mangudadatu

Rebecca A. Ampatuan is married to her cousin Akmad M. Ampatuan Sr. Wife Rebecca is director at the Regional Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) while husband Akmad Sr. is the incumbent vice mayor of Mamasapano. Akmad is among the Ampatuans charged with murder in connection with the 2009 Maguindanao Massacre, but who managed to run and win in the 2010 elections while behind bars.

Rebecca and Akmad have three known children, Lady Sha-Honey, Mohammad Bahnarin, and incumbent Mamasapano mayor Tahirodin Benzar.

Bahnarin, who was elected as local chief executive of Mamasapano in 2007, is married to Amina Sangki who is the daughter of Datu Zacaira Sangki and sister of Rasul Sangki. Rasul was one of the first witnesses who implicated Andal Jr. in the Maguindanao Massacre.

Father Zacaira and son Rasul currently serves as mayor and vice mayor, respectively, of the town of Ampatuan. In another town, Datu Abdullah Sangki, the Sangkis also hold the mayoral and vice mayoral posts.

Comelec's certified list of provincial and municipal candidates who are running in the May 2013 elections (as of Nov. 2012) shows that at least 25 candidates bear Sangki as either surname or middle name. The list includes those running for congressman, governor, vice governor, provincial board member, mayor, vice mayor, and councilor.

Datu Ali Balayman Sangki, former executive director of the Office on Muslim Affairs, has a daughter (Bai Mariam) who is married Sultan Kudarat Governor Datu Suharto T. Mangudadatu

Datu Suharto is the cousin of Maguindanao Governor Esmael 'Toto' G. Mangudadatu whose wife Genalyn and sisters Eden and Farida were among the 58 killed in the Nov. 23, 2009 massacre.

The Mangudadatus occupy top seats in Maguindanao and the province of Sultan Kudarat.

In Maguindanao, Toto's father Datu Pua is former Buluan mayor. His brothers Ibrahim, Zajid, and Freddie currently serve as local chief executives of the towns of Buluan, Pandag, and Mangudadatu, respectively. His sister, Rhamla M. Kadalim is member of the Sangguniang Bayan in Buluan. Toto's son King Jhasser also serves as Buluan vice mayor. He will turn 22 this April.

In Sultan Kudarat, Toto's uncle Datu Pax was congressman of the province's first district from 2007 to 2010. Datu Pax's son-in-law Datu Raden C. Sakaluran then took office in Congress in 2010. Raden's wife, Bai Ruth, is the current mayor of Lutayan town in Sultan Kudarat.

Comelec records show that at least 18 candidates with Mangudadatu s either as surname or middle name are running for local positions in May 2013.

Ampatuan-Midtimbang

Datu Zaldy U. Ampatuan, Andal Sr.'s son and one of the accused in the massacre, is married to Johaira 'Bongbong' Midtimbang, the daughter of former Guindulungan mayor Datu Midpantao Midtimbang.

Bongbong belongs to another political clan that currently holds office in the towns of Datu Hoffer Ampatuan, Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Guindulungan, and Talayan.

In 2010, Midpantao's children Bongbong, Guiadzali, and Midpantao Jr. were elected as Datu Hoffer Ampatuan mayor and Guindulungan mayor and SB member, respectively. His nephews Tungkang and Nathaniel, meanwhile, serve as incumbent mayors of Talayan and Datu Anggal Midtimbang. His brother Sukarno is also vice mayor of Talayan.

Ampatuan-Sinsuat

Two of Andal's Sr. sons are married to a Sinsuat: the late Hoffer to Ingrid Sinsuat and Sajid Islam to Zandria Sinsuat. Zandria currently sits as mayor of the town of Shariff Saydona Mustapha.

The Sinsuats are one of the oldest and most established clans in Maguindanao and the country. Their political lineage may be traced back since the 19th century along with the Masturas and Ampatuans, according to Alfred McCoy's *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines.*

Datu Odin Sinsuat Mayor Datu Lester Sinsuat and Vice Mayor Datu Sajid Sinsuat are sons of the town's former mayor, Datu Ombra Sinsuat.

Ombra's brothers Datu Bimbo and Datu Rusman served as Maguindanao vice governor in 2004 to 2007, and board member in 2001-2004, respectively. Datu Rusman was among the seven injured in the explosion that struck Governor Mangudadatu's convoy in Tacurong City on Aug. 15, 2011. At least one was reported killed in the incident. The Sinsuats are also believed to be related to the Mangudadatus.

In May 2013, at least 22 candidates with Sinsuat as either surname or middle name are running for local posts in Maguindanao.

Ampatuan-Dilangalen

Datu Amer Hussein 'Jeng' A. Macapendeg, Andal Sr.'s grandson by daughter Bai Shaydee, is married to Bai Donna Dilangalen, daughter of couple Didagen P. Dilangalen and Baisendig Guimba. Didagen and Baisendig both served as representatives of the first district of Maguindanao.

Another Dilangalen, Prince Mosafeer Mangudadatu Dilangalen, holds public office as incumbent vice mayor of Mangudadatu town. He is also Governor Mangudadatu's nephew.

At least eight candidates with Dilangalen as either surname or middle name are running for local posts in Maguindanao in the May 2013 elections.

Ampatuan-Datumanong-Hataman

Andal Sr. has declared Maguindanao Rep. Simeon A. Datumanong as his nephew in his SALNs. Zaldy has also declared the congressman as his cousin in his SALNs. Datumanong, however, has not listed Andal Sr. or any of his sons as his relatives in government in his SALNs.

Datumanong, in his personal data sheet filed with the House of Representatives, lists Bai Salama Ampatuan Datumanong of Maganoy as his mother. PCIJ could not determine the relationship of Bai Salama to Andal Sr.; she could either be his sister or cousin.

Simeon's daughter Merinissa is the wife of Basilan Rep. Hadjiman Salliman-Hataman, brother of ARMM Governor Mujiv S. Hataman.

Simeon's son Borgiva or Tasmi, meanwhile, had served three consecutive terms as provincial board member in Maguindanao.

Ampatuan-Sema

Maguindanao and Cotabato City Rep. Bai Sandra Ampatuan Sema is known as a relative of Andal Sr. No records, however, are available to establish the exact relationship of Bai Sandra to Andal Sr.
Bai Sandra's husband is Cotabato City vice mayor Muslimin Sema, who is also chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). ***– PCIJ, April 2013***

Sidebar, PART 2

Cash for cops, soldiers?

By Ed Lingao
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

IN ONE of the many raids conducted by government troops on the Ampatuan properties after the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, investigators came across a black bag containing a bundle of papers. In it were an assortment of official documents, including land titles, credit card statements, and even divorce papers all belonging to former Maguindanao Governor Datu Andal Ampatuan Sr., the patriarch of the Ampatuan clan.

What got the investigators' attention was a bunch of handwritten notes listing what appeared to be large amounts allocated to senior police and military commanders assigned, not just in Maguindanao, but in the entire Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Among the names were those of prominent generals from army divisions in the region, as well as of provincial and regional police officers.

The police and military commanders and units in the list were divided into three: the island provinces of Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi; Maguindanao; and Lanao del Sur and Marawi. The commanders were also broken down by ranks and positions: division commanders, brigade commanders, and battalion commanders; as well, regional and provincial police chiefs, and some city chiefs of police.

The notes indicate that amounts of up to P500,000 were appropriated for each of the division commanders and the head of the military command, P200,000 for regional police chiefs, and P100,000 for provincial police chiefs and army brigade commanders. The list goes all the way down to battalion level, with P50,000 set aside for each of the battalions throughout the area.

The grand total listed at the bottom of one of the pages: P4.3 million. Beside that total, also written by hand, is the name Bapa Teng, or Uncle Teng. Another list of allocations for the same commanders, but this time with differing amounts, was written on another set of papers with the note "c/o Jr." That second list of allocations amounts to more than P2 million.

A source close to the Ampatuan family told PCIJ that Bapa Teng is a member of the Ampatuan clan whom it uses as a "liaison" to the police and military commanders in both Maguindanao and ARMM. The amounts listed are likely to be the monthly disbursements that the family gives out to local commanders as goodwill money, the source added.

It is not unclear from the list alone if the amounts were meant to be disbursements for the personal use of the police and military commanders, or for official use by their units in the performance of their official peace and order functions. The military has repeatedly said it had worked closely with the Ampatuans in the past because of the assistance the clan gave military commanders in combating the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the area, both through logistics and manpower support.

The handwritten list recovered from the Ampatuan properties would almost certainly have no probative value in a court of law. It does, however, offer a startling glimpse into how the clans capture and compromise government institutions in areas like these, institutions that are supposed to act as checks and balances against abuse in the first place. Too, these disbursements illustrate that grey area that has largely defined, or more accurately, muddled, the troubled relationship between the national government and the institutions that represent it, and the clans that claim to represent their constituents.

In the case of the Ampatuan clan, which rose to preeminence during the long reign of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, it is a family that has shown mastery in wielding its clout on both the national and local level, by "capturing" local military and police commanders into its fold, and by playing on the needs, interests, and insecurities of Manila.

Retired Lt. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer, who served as Maguindanao's martial law administrator after the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, is one of the eight brigade commanders named in the handwritten notes (each brigade commander had an allocation of P100,000). Ferrer was brigade commander for the 103rd army brigade in Basilan before he was appointed commander of the 6th infantry division in Maguindanao in 2007.

Ferrer acknowledges the existence of "Bapa Teng," saying Teng would introduce himself to ranking officials as a "special liason" of the Ampatuans to the military and police commanders in the area."What I know is that he is Sukarno Teng," says Ferrer. "He claims to be the liaison of the Ampatuans with the military."

But Ferrer says he does not know if Bapa Teng handed out money to military commanders during the reign of the Ampatuans.

Ferrer says he never received any cash from the Ampatuans or their aides. He adds that he is not aware of any other military officer who has accepted cash from the clan. "I suspect this is how they liquidate money from the old man," he says. "They list down all the military commanders, and then they tell the old man that this is how much we need for them monthly. Some people make money out of it."

Ferrer admits, however, that the military and police units in the area had long been compromised by their association with the clans of Maguindanao. It is an association that was in part reinforced and cemented by the clan's own relationship with a "higher authority" in faraway Manila.

But the greater impact of the disbursements reflected in the list are more subtle than obvious; regardless of whether the money is a payola or financial assistance for operations, the recipient military commanders are now tethered to the donor in a system that values face-saving and the protection of honor at all costs.

"They subtly call it monthly support, allowance, assistance, etcetera," says one high-ranking active-duty officer who had also been assigned to the area before. While it would be up to the

unit commanders to decide if the money goes to operations or their own pockets, the mere receipt of monthly "support" from the clan would already put the local commanders in an awkward position.

"You are beholden to whomever is your source of support," the officer says. This practice was also prevalent in Davao during the time of President Ferdinand Marcos, he says. Rich businessmen would give "assistance" to the local Constabulary commanders for "goodwill," the unspoken agreement being the commanders would come to their assistance if the businessman gets into any kind of trouble.

"As a matter of policy, it is not allowed," the officer says. "As for ethical standards, it is not allowed. But since it is an unwritten understanding, some take advantage of it."

"That is why some unit commanders were keeping silent, they did not utter a word because they also benefitted from the Ampatuans," he says. "The family held them by their nose."

In addition, the disbursements are unlikely to have come from official sources, since local government units do not have any fund mechanisms to directly support military operations in their areas. Consequently, any debt of gratitude is to be owed, not to the local government unit, but to the politician who provided the funds.

Assuming the unit commanders are honest enough to spend the money for military operations, the fact that the money came from sources outside the military chain leaves too much room for corruption and manipulation. Notes the officer: "There is no accountability or auditing involved with the money, so they can just write it off."

Interestingly, the list of allocations to military and police officers dug up in Maguindanao in 2010 appeared to have been drawn up around the same period when then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was said to have counted on the Ampatuans and the military to deliver the votes in Maguindanao. A cross-referencing of the names of the senior military and police officials in the list against the positions they were holding showed that the list may have been drawn up between 2004 and 2005.

The issue would blow up in the face of both Arroyo and the Philippine military in 2005 with the emergence of the Hello Garci tapes, where allegedly wiretapped phone conversations had someone who sounded like the President seeking assurances from then Commission on Elections Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano of a minimum lead of one million votes over her rival, Fernando Poe Jr. In the end, Arroyo trounced Poe by a lead of 1.1 million votes.

The military was far from the disinterested observer of local and national politics during this period, as reflected in the number of senior military officers implicated in the wiretapped phone conversations. In fact, at least one general mentioned in the Hello Garci recordings also appears in the recently uncovered list as a commander of an army division in the area.

During the hearings by the military inquiry into the Hello Garci scandal, then Task Force Hope commander and Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia said it was clear AFP personnel had been involved in

anomalies in the 2004 polls. He told the inquiry: "We have to accept it that our officers have been involved in this. Let us not joke (sic) ourselves or try to delude ourselves in the idea *na walang nangyayari* because in fact things are happening."

The issue came to a head when two marine officers, Brig. Gen. Francisco Gudani and Lt. Col. Alexander Balutan, disobeyed a direct order from Arroyo and testified before a Senate committee that higher military command had ordered to "slacken" security in the May 2004 elections in Central Mindanao, leaving the door open for massive cheating. Gudani also told the Senate Committee on Defense that he had received information that then First Gentleman Mike Arroyo had huge cartons of cash flown into the region in order to influence the poll results.

Nine years later, the military's involvement in alleged cheating in the 2004 presidential race continues to rankle some officers. "They think so lowly of us, that they want to turn us into cheats," says one grizzled combat officer who had been assigned to Mindanao in 2004. " I cannot forget the faces of my colleagues who had died in the war, yet when election day comes, they just hold us by the neck and try to turn us into cheats."

The officer says he was aware the ballot counting was purposely delayed in ARMM in 2004 so that officials in Manila could first see the national trend and determine what had to be done to catch up. "They count the ARMM votes last, so they can establish the trend first," he says. "There are times when they use the military camps and bring the ballot boxes there. The AFP becomes an instrument for cheating."

He comments with visible disgust: "You fight and die to preserve your honor and dignity, and then they teach you to cheat for them." **– *PCIJ, April 2013***

Sidebar, PART 3

The Change-makers

By Ed Lingao
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

THEY BELONG to some of the most prominent political clans in central Mindanao, yet they are carving a path far removed from the mold of the traditional roles of their royal families.
Take Mussolini Lidasan, for instance. Much unlike his infamous namesake, Lidasan is a peace advocate, a writer, a community development specialist, and president of Aksyon Mindanaw, a political movement fighting for the rights of Christians, Muslims, and indigenous peoples. Lidasan is also executive director of the Al Qalam Institute, the research arm of the Ateneo de Davao University.

If that were not enough to append to one's name, Lidasan is also a member of the Iranun royalty. His father is Tahir Lidasan, a direct descendant of the Iranun Bugasan Sultanate, while his mother is a Sinsuat, granddaughter of Datu Sinsuat Balabaran, former Senator of the Republic. When the Maguindanao Massacre occurred in 2009, Lidasan was distraught; he had relatives with both the Ampatuan and Mangudadatu clans.

Lidasan represents a new generation of young Moros, those born with so-called royal blood who are not afraid to appear as if they are working against the interest of their own class. These young Moros break the image of the spoiled young royal born with a silver spoon in his mouth and a chip on the shoulder.

Lidasan himself is critical of the role that the clans continue to play in Maguindanao society, although it is a criticism that he carefully puts into the context of the region's rich history and heritage.

"The clan mindset will eventually become obsolete, whether we like it or not," he says. "People tend to move to find a better leader, a better framework, and a better future that will factor in the effects of climate change, disasters, etcetera."

The same attitude may be said of Zainuddin Malang and Naguib Sinarimbo, of the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center or MinHRac, one of the official observers in the peace talks between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). MinHRac is always one of the first organizations to investigate reports of ceasefire violations by either side, and assists as well in relief efforts in the endless stream of refugees that typically follows an armed encounter.

Malang, the executive director of MinHRac, is related to the Sinsuat clan; his mother is a Balabaran, the mother clan of the Sinsuats. In turn, Sinarimbo, a human-rights lawyer and a former executive secretary of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, is married to a member of the Alonto clan.

Malang says part of the job of civil society organizations is to disabuse Maguindanaoans of the idea that they have no power or voice in the way the clans govern their communities. This, Malang says, is the biggest challenge for CSOs today, especially since many Maguindanaoans have become so jaded that they have little expectations from their leaders.

"We have to raise the consciousness of the public to the fact that they can hold their leaders accountable," he says. "For 30 years, they were given the impression that they had no right to demand from their leaders."

Sinarimbo meanwhile observes that it was only recently that CSOs became active in Maguindanao. Before that, idealistic clan members had nowhere the channel their energies to.

"The rise of the CSOs in Maguindanao is a new phenomenon," says Sinarimbo." Only now, very recently are they rising, and it goes both ways. The CSOs are learning, and the government is learning how to accommodate the CSOs."

Such changes are seeing the participation of the young members of clans in many parts of Maguindanao. While their forefathers may have built some of their fiefdoms with ruthlessness and cunning, the new generation is now better schooled and trained. Some studied in exclusive schools, and some have even been sent abroad for education and training by parents who may have not even finished primary school. It is part of the inevitable evolution of the clans that elders would want to create more opportunities for their children. The result is a new generation that is, at least potentially, more exposed to new ideas and concepts, and possibly more willing to challenge the old ways that their elders have always held dear.

According to Bobby Taguntong, Maguindanao coordinator for CCARE, the Citizens Coalition for **ARMM Electoral** Reforms, this is a far cry from the turn of the century Maguindanao, when many clan elders resisted the idea of sending their children to Western schools. When the Americans tried to introduce a new educational system, Taguntong says, many clan elders viewed the move with suspicion, an attempt to "capture" the minds of the clans.

"Many of the Moros sent their children fleeing into the fields when the Americans set up an educational system," he says. "This is because of the thinking that if the children are educated by them, then the children will be theirs."

These days, there have been significant changes. Says Sinarimbo "There is more exposure now, both for those who have studied elsewhere, and for those who were shaped by local politics here. There is an evolution. But it is still in the early stages in the formation of this new mindset. How far this can go, I think, will really depend on the resolve of the new Maguindanaoan leaders." Taguntong says it is time that Maguindanaoans learn from their past, not just ancient history, but contemporary history as well. The lessons are slowly seeping in, as history and tradition are difficult competitors. The Ampatuan case, he says, is one such lesson that needs to be studied. "We have to learn from the past, to what happened with the Ampatuans," he notes." Secondly, the system of elections, many communities are now aware of their responsibilities in the elections. They have been informed of their right to suffrage, and their right to fight for their ballot."

Of course the challenges are still there, and at times, the old ways seem to have the upper hand. But Lidasan stresses that not everything from the past has to be discarded.

"My idea is that we need to value our past, live in our present time, and have an inclusive paradigm for development," he says.

In the end, Taguntong echoes the words of a hero from another era: "We don't have any more hope in the old generation, the ones we can convince are the youth. They are the ones who have a chance to learn about the right ways, so they should be our priority. As for the older generation, they already have bad habits. If you try to straighten the crooked, you just might break them." **–** ***PCIJ, April 2013***