FIELDNOTES ON THE VIGILANTE MOVEMENT IN MINDANAO: A MIX OF SELF-HELP AND FORMAL POLICING NETWORKS*

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Preface

Based on on-site field observations and interviews, this study explores village level police and vigilante organizations in the Philippines. A typology of social control systems is presented. The varying degrees of group "formality", "official authority", and "independence" of several control systems are discussed. Attention is given to the way informal control systems link with more official government police networks, and with the larger village community. This research helps to clarify "self-help" theory, and several propositions regarding the behavior of law in a battle-ridden society.

Introduction and Problem

The Filipino has attracted international attention by the method in which he has struggled to withstand the impact of political transition, outside insurgency, economic strife, and Muslim-Christian conflict (Drozdiak and Richburg, 1987; Fallows, 1988; Taylor, 1987; Ward, 1987).[1] However, very little focus has been given to the subsequent voluntary restructuring of communities at the local neighborhood level. Accordingly, this study examines the social organizational nature of several Philippine police and vigilante networks operating in the northwestern coastal area of Mindanao (Santoalla, 1987; Lluch, 1987).

It is understandable that news reports may tend to concentrate on the social turmoils in the Philippines as they occur in major cities like Manila, Davao, and Cebu. The fact remains that the vast majority of the more than 60 million Filipinos live in thousands of small, often isolated villages scattered throughout the islands. Life typically goes on in these 30,000 or so rural villages at a more leisurely pace than depicted by outside news releases. Even when national political changes occur, several months or years may elapse before consequences are felt in some rural areas.

Nonetheless, in recent years the combined influences of political, economic, and socio-religious conflicts have been of sufficient intensity and duration to effect a noticeable rearrangement of local, and even isolated communities. Such modifications appear to be organizational in character, and represent clear efforts to maintain a sense of order and harmony at the village level. This is especially noticeable in regard to the establishment of neighborhood security groups.

This paper will respond to three general research questions. First, from a descriptive point of view, how are the various formal and informal Philippine policing systems portrayed at the village level? For example, can a typology of social control strategies be outlined, which reflects both official police systems, as well as, the more informal, (or vigilante) mechanisms of control? Second, what linkages, if any, exist between the informal vigilante organizations and the formal or official government agencies of control? In other words, what is the form of the role-relationships which bind the various social control systems to each other? Third, what is the relationship between the different styles of social control, and the larger village communities in which they are found? Specifically, do the vigilante groups appear to be isolated and renegade in character, or are they integrated into the social structure of the established communities?

Theoretical Orientation

Several theoretical assumptions help guide the study. The first derives from "self-help" theory. For example, Baumgardner (1980) reports that as established formal agencies of social control are lost or withdrawn from a community, volunteer or "self-help" groups predictably emerge to satisfy the original aims of the agencies.[2] Accordingly, how a community might strive to maintain control and harmony in the face of disasters, natural or otherwise, with the resulting loss of utilities and public services, is a related perspective (Sennett, 1970; Mileti, Drabek, and Haas, 1975). In the case of the Philippines over the past several years, it is clear that government police and military agencies of control have been strained against persistent internal and external threats. Consequently, reports of an upsurge of community, voluntary "self-help" groups seem reasonable if not predictable.

Second, related theoretical assumptions as outlined by Donald Black are also applicable. He argues that "formal law varies inversely with other styles of social control" (Black, 1976: 74-107), that is, law (i.e., official police intervention, for example) becomes weaker, less prevalent, and even less necessary when people are knit closer together by community bonds (See, Diamond, 1971; cf. Rieder, 1984). If it is true that Filipino villagers are being drawn closer together in the face of danger, are they as a result inventing their own security systems out of self-protection, rather than relying only upon official control systems? In this regard, Black (1976: 86-87) argues that as a society increases in its quantity of organization, as during wartime, a corresponding increase is predicted in its level of law or quantity of policing systems. Hence, the Republic of the Philippines, during the recent era of revolution and near civil war, provides a timely stage-setting for observing and assessing the character of police and vigilante movements at the village level.

Setting and Procedures

This research combined at least three methods of data collection. First, on-site interviews were conducted in the villages of Cabili and Tibanga, located on the outskirts of Iligan City, in the province of Lanao del Norte, Mindanao. Iligan is an industrial city situated on a coastal inlet bordering the China Sea. Cabili and Tibanga are satellite villages located a few miles from the city proper, each having a population of several thousand.

Both structured and open-ended interviews were completed with local civic leaders including: police constables, fiscals (prosecutors), newspaper publishers, and barangay (village) captains. On several occasions interviews were completed with members of long-established village security groups as well as vigilante group representatives. Additionally, university staff, school teachers, merchants, farmers, and unemployed private citizens rounded out the interview data. Although information resulting from earlier trips to the field sites in 1980 and 1985 provided insights useful in response to the research questions, a return visit during the summer of 1987 allowed for specific inquiry into the nature of vigilante groups.

An examination of local documents provided a second data source. Summary reports from the police and courts, considered public records, were examined. Moreover, detailed scrutiny of three small local newspapers, *The Mindanao Scoop; The Lanao Mail;* and *The Mindanaw Week*) furnished valuable information regarding local political concerns and activities. A year of back issues of these publications were canvassed for any news items or editorials regarding local "self-help" or vigilante activity. The newspapers were little more than local gossip sheets, but did reveal points of interest which were probed during interviews.

Third, local life and customs pertinent to the research aims were directly observed whenever practicable and recorded in daily diaries.

Findings

The findings of the study offer an overview of various styles of policing and social control which have either traditionally existed, or have recently emerged to provide village security in the research site. The field notes reflect at least six styles of social control which are outlined in Table 1. These police or community security systems range from government police and military forces, to unofficial vigilante organizations. Several control systems tend to be situated between the two extremes and are categorized as semi-official.[3] The policing types are arranged in Table 2 to show the relationship between the degree of organization (i.e., formal, semi-formal and informal),[4] and if the control system is national or local in scope. Also noted in Table 2 is whether or not a policing type represents a village "self-help" control system.

TABLE I
TYPOLOGY OF PHILIPPINE SOCIAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

Type	Designation	Description	Authority
1	"PC/INP"	Police Constabulary/Integrated National Police	Official
2	"CHDF"	Civilian Home Defense Force	Official
3	"Tanod"	Village (Barangay)* Security Brigade	Semi-official
4	"Nakasaka"	Government-inspired unification of people for peace	Semi-official
5	"Alsa Masa"	Rising up of masses in self-protection; extremist splinter groups (vigilante)	Unofficial
6	"Inpos"	Relatively independent system of field informants	Unofficial

Philippine term designating political boundary — similar to barrio

A.   Official Police Systems

1.   Philippine Constabulary/Integrated National Police (PC/INP):

A young Filipino may enlist in the armed forces by choosing the Army, Navy, Air Force or the Philippine Constabulary (i.e., PC). In fact, the PC, created in 1901, is the oldest of the nation's four armed services. It was established to preserve peace and order within the Philippines. In 1980, the Philippine Constabulary strength was around 33,500 (Bunge, 1984:268). Given the geographic diversity of the Philippines, it was clear that the nation needed a centralized and mobile force to provide law enforcement functions involving major crimes. The Constabulary also includes a nationwide highway patrol force.

The more traditional city and municipal police forces (i.e., the Integrated National Police) have also existed side-by-side with the Constabulary for decades. However, compared with the Constabulary, the city and town police were typically concerned with lesser crimes and with more purely domestic issues. In 1980, there were about 51,000 INP officers throughout more than 1,500 cities and municipalities. In 1975 former President Marcos established through a decree the combined PC/INP, placing the Philippine Constabulary as the military authority over all city

and municipal police forces. In effect, the President, as commander-in-chief, was able to maintain military control over all official policing in the nation.

This aspect of martial law was not dismantled by President Aquino, and persists today. Not surprisingly, some rift has existed as to which unit (i.e., PC or INP) should actually be in charge at the small town level. The city and town police, rather than the Constabulary, are more likely to know the citizenry, and may feel more capable than their military superiors in handling local police problems. The history and relationship between the PC and the INP is colorful and complex, but is not within this paper's scope. However, the relationship between the national forces and village level security groups is of prime concern.

2. Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF)

Although the police officers of the various cities and towns are academy trained, their numbers are limited given the nation's population (i.e., about one officer per 1,500 people). Moreover, the combined PC/INP is primarily situated in urban areas. Consequently, the bulk of the population, residing in the thousands of rural villages, is without the protection of the Constabulary or the National Police.

Because political-religious conflicts in the Philippines have often centered in rural areas, a critical need has existed for additional community security. The Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF), numbering about 71,000, has helped to fill the law enforcement void in these isolated areas (See, Jones, 1987a; Richberg, 1986a). In several villages within the research site, which were without regular police, civilians stepped forward to fill the positions of CHDF officers.

Respondents noted two categories of armed CHDF personnel, neither of which received formal police training. First, were the citizens who volunteered to be a part of the civilian force, but only for the specific purpose of protecting one's own home and family. Qualified citizens were authorized to keep a handgun, or in some cases were provided with one by the PC. Second, should citizens volunteer for the more traditional police duties of the village (i.e., filling the roles of Integrated National Police), they may be given fatigue uniforms, a small salary of 200 pesos per month (i.e., about $10), and high-powered weapons. These CHDF volunteers reported directly to the Philippine Constabulary. Since the PC/INP staff were usually absent from the villages, the CHDF were left to perform police duties as best as they could with only the barest amount of training or professionalism. Citizens were quick to criticize the CHDF members who they often perceived as "rag-tag police." Regardless, the CHDF does act as an official, though only semi-organized, policing unit at the village level.[5]

TABLE 2
DEGREE OF ORGANIZATION AND SCOPE OF POLICING SYSTEMS

Scope	Formally Organized	Semi-Formally Organized	Informally Organized
National	"PC/INP"	"CHDF"	"Nakasaka" (self-help)
Local	"PC/INP" (Occasionally)	"Tanod" (self-help)	"Inpos" (self-help)

B. Semi-official Village Control System

1. Tanod:

The "Tanod" is a security group operating at the village or barangay level very much like a "neighborhood watch" program. The Philippines is sub-divided into cities, municipalities, and 48,481 barangays or barrios. Barangays may be independent, isolated communities, as in the case of a rural village, or these may be clustered together to form towns, cities and large metropolitan areas such as Manila (a city comprising 1,760 barangays). Nonetheless, every Filipino throughout the nation technically resides in, or is attached to, a particularly barangay, somewhat in the sense that all citizens in the United States are within a certain voting precinct. A vast majority of the barangays (i.e., referred to simply as barrios prior to 1978) possess a variety of community organizations, one of which pertains to "barangay justice" (See, Silliman, 1986 ; Austin, 1987). This neighborhood-based justice program maintains an informal court structure for dispute processing, and incorporates the barangay "Tanod."

Although the national government recognizes barangay justice organization and keeps some records as to their activities, the "Tanod" groups are only tacitly recognized and best described as semi-official. Recruitment into the "Tanod" security group is through appointment by the barangay captain. The members, who may number about six in an average size barangay of about 900 citizens, are not generally salaried, do not wear uniforms, and operate only under a most loosely structured set of rules.

Basically, the "Tanod" members represent a group of male friends who have almost certainly been reared together in the same village, and who gain a sense of pride from being a part of the community organization.[6] The barangay captain is elected by popular vote and maintains a substantial amount of community support as well as influence with local town mayors, and with the PC/INP. The "Tanod" members are extremely loyal to the barangay captain, and would most likely not follow the orders of anyone else without the approval of the captain. Although it may very well be unauthorized, the "Tanod" members occasionally

possess firearms, most likely homemade, or furnished by the captain. The captain, on the other hand, may have been provided with weapons by the Constabulary or a politically influential mayor (i.e., who often has his own private security forces), who wishes to win the loyalty of the captain (Jones, 1987b).

Perhaps, even more than the CHDF, the "Tanod" members are aware of local gossip, friendship patterns, and daily neighborhood activities within the village. Whereas the CHDF may also be from the local area, they are organizationally tied to the military, thus potentially tarnishing their loyalty to the village — even if slightly so.[7] The "Tanod" members, however, remain within the confines of the village ready to mobilize if called upon. The "Tanod" must be seen more as a community "self-help" activity, in the purest sense.

2. Nakasaka

A second system of control categorized as semi-official is the "Nakasaka" (i.e., in the Visayan "Nagkahiusang katawhan alang sa kalinaw" or "unification of people for peace"). As suggested by Tables 1 and 2, the "Nakasaka" is national in scope, although with limited, if any, manifest qualities of organization. In fact, in 1987, the word "nakasaka" was used primarily as a slogan employed by politicians, or other mission-oriented individuals to stir the citizenry to rise up in the name of peace and order. "Nakasaka" began as an idea or "ideal" encouraged to a great extent by President Aquino. Most notable was the "people power" movement which clearly came to reality when thousands of citizens took to the streets of Manila to confront the troops and tanks of the faltering President Marcos.[8] This ideal, at first only a visionary and abstract campaign goal, was given further identity and credibility by being indirectly referenced in presidential speeches (Aquino, 1986).

At this point, it is difficult to articulate or categorize the "Nakasaka" movement, and even more perplexing to assess or measure it. At best, one can say it is a national enthusiasm or "gemeinschaft" strongly felt by Aquino advocates, and recognized as a force to be dealt with by government adversaries. Although it is probable that groups referred to as "Nakasaka" have organized in the Philippines, it is more likely that the "people power" spirit has fueled various splinter groups which go by different names. The same enthusiasm at the most local level that inspired one to join the CHDF, the "Tanod," or even the PC/INP, may also stimulate one to organize terrorist-oriented vigilante groups. Such crusading groups may kill in the name of "Nakasaka," and have on occasion embarrassed the Aquino administration (Mydans, 1987; Newsbriefs, 1987; Serrill, 1987).

C.   Unofficial Vigilante Groups

1.   "Alsa Masa"

The "Alsa Masa" is a rather tightly organized grouping of citizens who have unofficially taken it upon themselves to combat the communist-inspired New People's Army (NPA). The organization began in 1985 with a handful of enthusiastic individuals in Davao City, and by mid-1987 reportedly numbered in the

thousands (Serrill, 1987; cf., Richburg, 1986b). "Alsa Masa" literally translates from the Tagalog language as an "uprising of the masses." As such, it appears to logically flow from the larger "Nakasaka" political ideal.

Organizationally, the "Alsa Masa" movement, which has spread outside Davao into other areas of Mindanao, represents the more classic image of violence-oriented vigilante groups, in that their professed aim is to save democracy and they claim a good ideal of popular support. However, their tactics are suspect, if not illegal, placing the PC/INP and the Aquino administration in a bind of having to denounce what may be a relatively successful defense against insurgents.

The literature is expectedly scant regarding the "Alsa Masa," but respondents claim their techniques include setting up highway checkpoints, armed patrols, and covert neighborhood surveillances. They are said to move from house to house soliciting donations for their cause, (i.e., cash, food items, including animals that can be eaten). The houses of those who contribute are marked so that future patrols will recognize sympathizers. Not surprisingly, some residents feel intimidated, coerced, or frightened. At the checkpoints, the same tactics may be used to solicit things of value.

As a result, the prevailing mood of the village is one of nervous anticipation mixed with deference to the outlay groups who at times claim more success than the PC/INP. If confronted by the Army or the Constabulary, the "Alsa Masa" groups may bring forward some of their members who also belong to the CHDF, adding confusion to the overall picture of social control.

2. "Inpos"

A second style of vigilante control which must be categorized as unofficial and informal in character are the "Inpos". The term "inpo" is a shortened version of "informant." Provincial villagers, as do many Filipinos elsewhere, pronounce the "F" sound as "P," thus "inpos" rather than "inform."[9] Respondents of the research site emphatically stated that coconut tree climbers (i.e., "mga manananggot" or coconut pickers) were the best "inpos" since they can see far from their treetop observation posts.

The PC/INP as well as other official or semi-official control systems, rely upon information from isolated villagers who farm in the outback regions of the province and who are likely to observe guerrilla activities. It does not appear that the Philippine Constabulary or other policing agents actively recruit the lone informant. Reportedly, the isolated farmworker-informant, if he is so inclined, will voluntarily relay information regarding rebel movements by messenger or telephone to provincial radio stations. In turn, it is the radio announcer who sifts through the information and then broadcasts the reported activities over the air. In this way, the location of rebels will be immediately known to the citizens, the CHDF, the Army and the PC (See, Figure 1).[10]
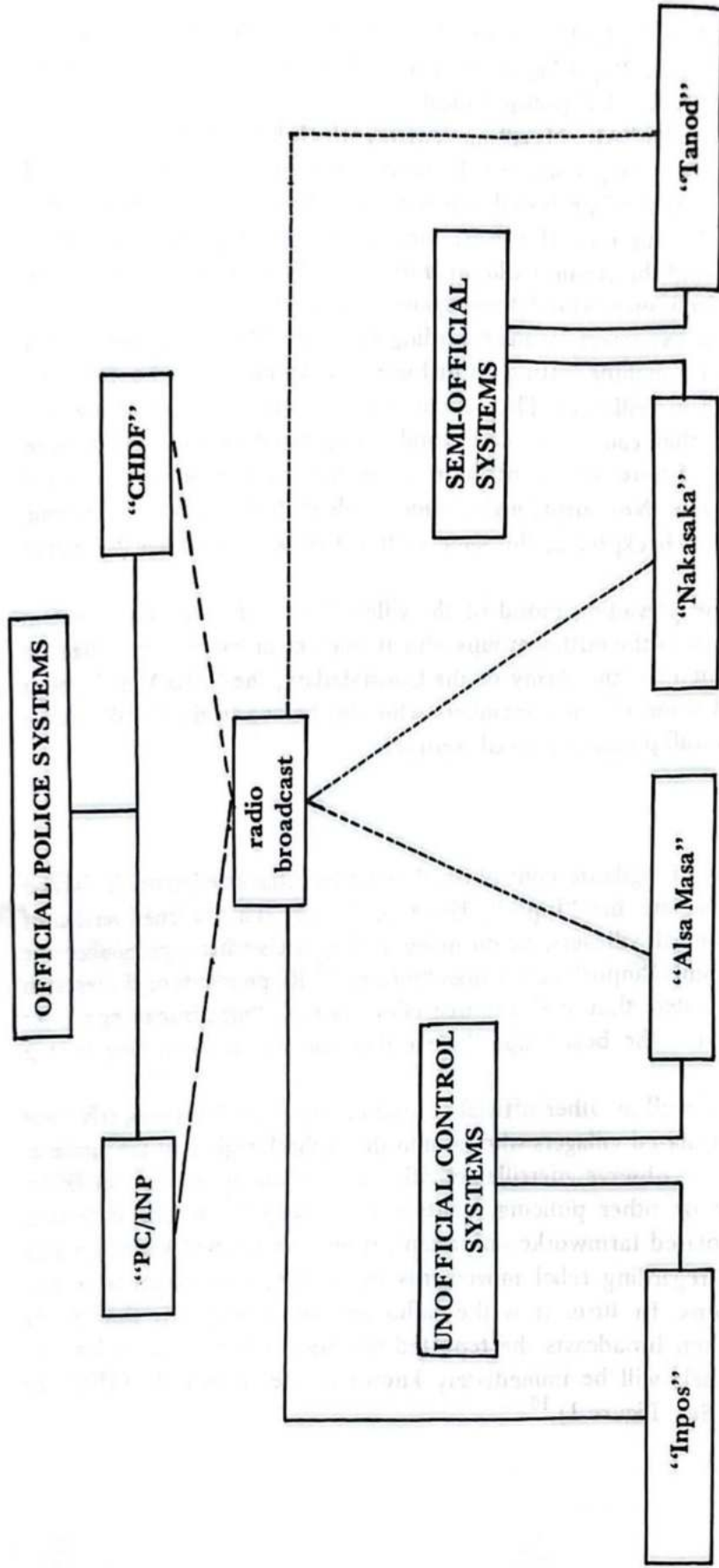
Figure 1. INFORMATION·FLOW BETWEEN SOCIAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

Such a system is advantageous to the citizenry as it gives them time to prepare (i.e., lock doors or leave the area) should rebels be known to be approaching the community. Ironically, the person most exposed to risk is the radio announcer. It is not uncommon for announcers to be assassinated or radio stations bombed. The reason for such an unorthodox method of relaying information is not clear. Apparently, the citizenry feels more comfortable passing information to a friendly, though geographically detached announcer, rather than to be impersonal Army or Constabulary. This is particularly true if people do not fully trust the official control systems. Also, the "inpos" realize they are, in effect, aiding their fellow villagers, regardless of whether or not the military finds the broadcasts useful.

Discussion

The emergence and interplay of the village control systems allow for further clarification of "self-help" principles. Regarding the villages in the research site, it is clear that in the summer of 1987, the citizens were not only much aware of the need to fill police roles in the absence of official government agencies, but willing to take part in either official, semi-official, or unofficial capacities. Whereas the formal police agencies (PC/INP) were constantly in need of recruits, such was not the case at the informal community level. Given the proliferation and persistence of the "Tanod," "Inpos," and "Alsa Masa" type systems in the last few years, it is quite evident that "self-help" agencies in the research site are not only alive but robust.

Although the data did not permit quantitative analysis of police reports, the villagers did not appear to complain of traditional street crimes. Given the prevalence of various control agencies (official or not), the likelihood of rapid increases in street crimes, even during times of turmoil, seems unlikely. The biggest fear was from those control agents who may overzealously demand donations for their cause (i.e., "CHDF", "Alsa Masa", and even the "PC/INP"). The kidnapping (i.e., hostage-taking) and murder rate is high, but as a result of rebel attacks rather than by village-based self-help groups. With the exception of the "Alsa Masa" type organizations, vigilantism in the research site pertains to "being vigil" rather than revenge-seeking.[11] Other than the ongoing Muslim-Christian conflicts and political insurgents, life at the village level goes on about as usual. Rice is still planted and children still go to school. However, "life as usual" may still be a step backward given the prevailing economic instability in the area (Fallows, 1988).

There seems to be no doubt that the data corroborates Black's prediction that "formal controls vary inversely with information controls." As the PC/INP move out, the Civilian Home Defense Force is established. If the CHDF is not adequate, the "Tanod" can be enlarged. Finally, and somewhat as a last resort, the self-propelled and unofficial vigilante systems such as the "Alsa Masa" or the independent "Inpos" come forth.

Moreover, Black predicts that during wartime, a nation increases in its level of organization. Communities will become more involved and complex, given the expansion of functions. Accordingly, a parallel increase was observed in the research site in various styles and diversities of policing systems. Black did not elaborate on

the precise organizational nature of the control systems which would emerge during wartime. However, in Lanao del Norte, it is evident that a variety of police styles surfaced, as they were required to fulfill specific community needs. The degree of organization remains mixed and, at this point, unpredictable as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF SELF-HELP SYSTEMS

Degree of Openness	Independent	Group Oriented
Covert	"Nakasaka" & "Inpos"	"Alsa Masa"
Open	"Nakasaka" (occasionally)	"Tanod"

"Self-help"-oriented systems persisted, or were established, which represented both clandestine as well as open policing systems. Also, vigilante groups surfaced which were, on one extreme, highly individualistic (i.e., lone informants), and on the other, rather highly structured groups as in the case of the "Alsa Masa" or the "Tanod." The degree to which the various "self-help" groups are organized also appears to be mixed, that is, in the case of the "Nakasaka," at least in the research site, there was no mention of actual citizen groups which convened, even on an irregular basis. Nonetheless, individual citizens are very much aware of the ideal or the cause and if prompted, may rise up. No villagers were known to occupy any specific roles regarding "Nakasaka" organizations. It must be characterized as an unorganized latent system.

However, the "Alsa Masa" and "Tanod" are highly structured complex groups. Both are made up of members who fulfill particular roles within the group. Furthermore, groups are hierarchically arranged with some roles being defined as higher or lower in status. For example, there is a chief of the "Tanod" representing the security group, and who relays information to and from the Barangay Captain. Furthermore, the "Tanod" is an open rather than covert village system. Although uniforms are not evident, on occasion a member may be seen wearing a T-shirt on which is imprinted the word "Tanod."

Interview data also support the fact that "Alsa Masa" type groups are well-structured with status-oriented roles and with identified locations for periodic gatherings. Whereas the "Tanod" is clearly integrated into the village social structure, the same cannot be said of the "Alsa Masa". Such an unofficial vigilante system as the "Alsa Masa", although highly structured tends to be covert and distinct from the village social system. This is particularly true of the more extremist groups which are inclined to use terroristic tactics.[12]

NOTES

[1] There is some indication that the Philippines is increasingly perplexed by traditional street crimes on top of political turmoil and terrorist attacks from foreign agents and religious radicals (Asiaweek, 1987). In the midst of such disorder, it is difficult to separate traditional crime from acts instigated by outside agents or the religious rebels. News reports reflect that 134 kidnappings occurred between 1986 and 1987 in the research site (province) of Lanao del Norte (Timonera, 1987).

[2] Indeed, the logic of purposely reducing the numbers of police personnel (i.e., "depolicing") in order to generate voluntary organizations, may have some plausibility (Baumgardner, 1980).

[3] For purposes of this paper, an "official" system of social control was defined as one established by the national government. Although other control systems may be approved or endorsed by the government, they are not established by it. The category of "semi-official" system seems more appropriate.

[4] A control system is defined as being formally organized or structured if it displays explicit rules and expectations. Also, if the system is comprised of hierarchically arranged positions and roles, then the quality of organization is presumed to be greater.

[5] One respondent joked that the only uniform they have is one they take off an enemy soldier. Given the internal conflict in the Philippines, it is often difficult to tell, by looking at a uniform, who the enemy is. It is not unheard of for a PC officer and an INP officer riding in the same jeep to have different loyalties.

[6] Although the CHDF is primarily seen as a rural force, some urban governors have managed to employ its members as auxiliary police as in Manila or Quezon City). "Tanod" members of one barangay proudly displayed old and worn identification cards made of paper kept in their wallets. The card showed their name, the fact that they were a member of the barangay "Tanod," and the name of the barangay.

[7] During times of civil uprising, entire military units were known to have shifted allegiances. This makes the relatively isolated CHDF members nervous at best as to their relationship with the Constabulary troops who may pass by the village or checkpoints.

[8] The dramatic display of "people power" was televised worldwide and is mentioned almost reverently by Aquino supporters as the "EDSA Revolution" (i.e., "Epifanio de los Santos Avenue," where the confrontation occurred; See Nemenzo, 1987).

[9] Local farmers of Lanao del Norte referred in jest to the coconut picker "Inpos" as "MP's" . . . a play on words in that in the Philippines an "MP" is known to be a "military police."

[10] The tree climber "inpos" system must be defined as informal in group structure. The lone informant links with the community only occasionally, and operates

under loosely established rules. They do not appear to be closely attached to other security groups and possess no organizational features identifying them with security systems. Their style was kiddingly referred to as "walay sapatos" (i.e., shoeless).

[11] News reports and field notes suggest that some unofficial vigilante groups do seek revenge. In order to gain membership into some extremist groups, initiates must kill a member of the New People's Army (NPA). Members show faithfulness to the group by inflicting self-torture (i.e., cutting of arms or chest, leaving valued scars). The "Tad-tad" vigilante group (i.e., meaning "chop chop") is most notorious (Asia-week, 1987) for this kind of practice.

[12] One extremist and unofficial vigilante group calling themselves the "Sagrado Corazon Senor" (i.e., "Holy or sacred heart") would hide out on the beach at night where they would scavenge for food. They felt their vengeful, terroristic acts would restore democracy and were approved by the deity. In the safety of darkness they would visit PC or CHDF highway checkpoints to witness or pray for their cause (i.e., hopefully with an audience) prior to searching out individuals they perceived as enemies.

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