Resurgence & Insurgents
The Origins of Secularism in the Aceh Conflict

By
Shane Joshua Barter
BA, University of Victoria, 2003

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of religion, specifically its absence, in the ongoing separatist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. Several approaches to the source and mobilization of ethnic identity are investigated, including a specific focus on religious mobilization and political Islam. Case studies of historical Aceh, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines illustrate these theories, where Islam is primarily mobilized from below in conflicts, although leaders play important roles as well. Each of these cases witnessed a growth of political Islam as the conflicts endured, pushing leaders towards religious interpretations. Aceh provides a deviant case study; despite a history of Islamic conflict, other case studies, a deeply Islamic culture, decades of conflict, and global trends towards political Islam, the conflict lacks significant religious elements. What accounts for Acehnese secularism and how does this speak to broader theory? Acehnese secularism is a product of several factors; namely, a shared faith between state and separatist and a secular rebel leadership educated in and operating from Western countries. This thesis presents a case where, despite an orthodox population, Islam has not been mobilized in the conflict. It also illustrates the role of leaders in determining the nature of a conflict and suggests a role for Islamic leaders in community-level peace talks.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Acronyms</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Methodology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study and Comparative Methodologies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Selection</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Debates</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Above</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Below</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Change and Uncertainty</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Above</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Below</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Within</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Case Studies</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Aceh</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Thailand</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Philippines</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aceh Conflict</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Free Aceh Movement</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAM Strategies</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Ethnic Conflict</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Religion</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Assessment</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis A</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis B</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievances</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis C</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAM Strategy</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAM Policy</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Implications</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Implications</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps &amp; Images</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Acronyms
Southeast Asia, specifically Indonesia, is a land of acronyms. Here is a list of some of the most relevant for this study:

ASNLF Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front, the original name of the GAM and its dominant faction, based in Sweden
ARMM Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, established in 1996 after an agreement between the MNLF and Philippines Government
ASG Abu Sayyaf Group, terrorist splinter from MILF created in 1991, largely collapsed in 1998 with the death of its leaders, Abubakar Janjalani
FMIA Front Mujahidin Islam Aceh, short-lived Islamist GAM splinter group
GAM Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), refers to the rebel movement in Aceh, established 1976 by Hasan di Tiro
HMI Muslim Students Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam)
HUDA Congregation of Acehnese Ulama (Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh)
IMM Muhammadiyah Student Association (Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah)
MILF Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Islamic splinter from MNLF from 1982
MNLF Moro National Liberation Front, established 1972 to unify Mindanao Muslims in their fight for independence
MP-GAM GAM Government Council (Majelis Pemerintahan), GAM splinter based in Malaysia
NAD The Province of Aceh (Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam)
New PULO Islamic splinter from PULO, created 1995
PUSA All-Aceh Ulama Association (Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh), organized in 1939 under Dutch rule, the first mass religious organization in Aceh, led by Daud Beureueh
TNI Indonesia Military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia), known as ABRI (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik) under Suharto
Acknowledgements

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This thesis would not have been possible if not for the guidance of professors such as Tom Legler, Robert Bedeski, Brian Job, Peter Dauvergne, Paul Evans, and Alan Jacobs. Friends in Vancouver’s Acehnese community, as well as Josh Gabriel, Matthew Gillard, and Kevin Madison provided invaluable conversations. Thank you to Melissa Duong for several suggestions and for allowing me to think out loud. Most of all, I owe so much to Diane Mauzy, whose guidance, suggestions, corrections, and office enabled me to produce what I hope is a legible and intuitive study.

I dedicate this thesis to my friend Arif Rusli, taken by the tsunami before he could realize his dream.
1 Introduction

Conflicts are about more than material power. Sometimes from their beginnings, but more frequently as they evolve, they involve identity. Nationalism, culture, and especially religion play important roles in providing inspiration, meaning, and unity to soldiers, rebels, leaders, and civilians. Neither conflict nor its religious justifications have disappeared with modernization, and although the dedication to explaining each is stronger than ever, our track record is not what the world would hope for. Though far from a clash of civilizations, there are a number of conflicts—from separatism, to terrorism, to invasion—which continue to take on religious dimensions as they play out. The mixture of religious identity and conflict has negative consequences for each, denigrating the perception (and reality) of some faiths and adding greater complexity to conflicts, forming a destructive feedback loop. We must explore the interaction these parts if we hope to understand such conflicts and work towards peace.

A large number of separatist conflicts tend to take on religious elements. My focus is how and why religion is mobilized in separatist conflicts through a deviant case: Aceh, Indonesia. The Republic of Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world, the most populous Muslim state, and contains remarkable diversity throughout its thousands of islands, “a kind of Eastern Aegean.”\(^1\) Located on the Northwest tip of Sumatra on Indonesia’s western periphery, the Province of Aceh is known for its devout Islamic faith and a decades-long separatist conflict. This conflict is unique: Not only has it remained secular, it has done so despite a history of Islamic conflict. This deviant case allows us to

explore some important questions: What accounts for secularism in the Aceh conflict and how does this speak to broader theory?

This paper comprises six sections. (1) I begin with three hypotheses which seek to explain Acehnese secularism, after which I define some key concepts. (2) I then turn to methodology: Case study and comparative approaches and justifying my case selection. Section (3) explores two related debates. First, I review instrumentalist and primordialist explanations of the sources and mobilization of ethnic identity. Second, I refine this debate to focus on the source of religious mobilization in conflicts. The next section (4) explores three case studies which illustrate these theories: Historical Aceh, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines. These cases provide a contrast to the role of religion in the current Aceh conflict, my core case study. Section (5) returns to my hypotheses, assessing which holds the most analytical power. (6) Finally, I look to the implications of my findings in terms of theory and practice.

Hypotheses

What accounts for secularism in the Aceh conflict? This question may be modeled as follows, where the dependent variable (Y) is secular conflict and our goal is to understand its cause, the independent variable (X).

$$X (?) \rightarrow Y \text{ (Secular Conflict)}$$

Edward Aspinall takes aim at the same question: “Aceh should be a major centre for the militant Islamist groups ...yet the major oppositional force in Aceh today is essentially secular nationalism.”

I present three hypotheses to explain why the conflict is secular:

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2 Edward Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh,” presented at Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia, organized by the East-West Center in Bali (June 16-17
A) A separatist conflict will remain secular if there are no religious grievances. This grievance-based approach suggests that the type of grievances experienced dictates the nature of the conflict. For instance, if a centralized state embarks on assimilationist programmes among religious minorities, there is a strong chance of religious conflict based on religious grievances. The reverse may also hold true, where the Aceh conflict is secular because Indonesia has not offended the Acehnese in terms of religion.

B) A common faith between state and separatists will mitigate the chances of religious conflict. One of the goals of separatist groups is to emphasize differences between themselves and the host population, satisfying the spirit of self-determination and helping to unify their constituents. If a separatist region shares a certain trait with its host state, this trait becomes less salient as a source of grievance and as a marker for identification. Because Aceh and Indonesia are mostly Sunni Muslim, religious affinity prevents the emergence of religious separatism and may even help bring them together.

C) A separatist conflict will remain secular if secular rebel leaders have the motivation and the power to shape the conflict. Here, I look to the role of conflict entrepreneurs, namely the rebel leadership, in shaping the culture of the conflict. Instrumental leaders with secular backgrounds, interests, alliances, and strategies will have an interest in maintaining a secular conflict where possible, although I expect that steering the public away from faith will be difficult at best.

I have suggested three possible explanations for Acehnese secularism: Grievances, affinity, and instrumentalism. The first thesis is a response to the author’s field interviews, while the second and third have been arrived at through a process similar to

2003). Quoted with permission from the author, the paper highlights some of the central elements of Dr. Aspinall’s forthcoming book on the roles of religion and nationalism in the Aceh conflict.
John Stuart Mill’s ‘Method of Difference’. Mill’s second canon states that “if an instance in which the phenomenon (secularism) occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance in common...the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ is the cause of the phenomenon.” I arrived at my hypotheses after considering how Aceh differs from other separatist conflicts. Unlike Mill’s model, I have found two possible causes of the phenomenon in question: Aceh holds the same religion as Indonesia and its rebels are led by rich, Western-based elites. My goal is to understand which explanation holds more analytical power and how they interact.

Clarifications

As with most separatist conflicts, territory and resources are not only contested, but so are culture, history, and vocabulary. Separatist groups promote their own dialects as a means to create a unified identity, nurture culture, grant dignity, and approach political institutions on their own terms. By using the term Aceh, as opposed to Atjeh or Acheh, the spellings preferred by the rebel movement, I do not throw my lot behind the Indonesian Government. Aceh is the most recognized spelling, as any survey or search engine will confirm. Similarly, by ‘southern Thailand’ I refer to the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and to a lesser extent Satun and Songkhla. By ‘the southern Philippines’ I refer to the Muslim provinces of Mindanao Island: Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao. I refer to separatist regions through the names given by their host states for the sake of clarity.

By secularism, I refer to a worldview which is consciously not religious, including an attempt to separate religion from science, politics, and other realms. The term ‘attempt’ is important because I recognize that the secular includes several elements of the religious, such as myth, faith, and morality. One must also avoid approaching secularism as “only apparently secular but in reality religious.” Talal Asad argues that while secularism involves several constructs from religion, it does not constitute a new faith. I acknowledge that secularism poses a problematic political concept. Regardless of its philosophical soundness, secularism is an identifiable ideology where ‘traditional’ religion is separated from ‘modern’ realms and is relegated to the private sphere. In claiming that some insurgents are secular, I suggest they are pursuing a strategy, but I do not assume this particular worldview is innately modern, rational, or free from myth.

To measure secularism, one should first observe an absence of religion where one would expect to find it. For instance, a Muslim rebel group will likely observe religious holidays, construct mosques, and have ties with foreign Muslim organizations. An absence of these activities points towards secularism, even though rebels may identify themselves as Muslims. A second, more conclusive step is a conscious attempt to avoid religion, especially statements which formally reject it. If observers label a rebel group ‘Islamic’ and rebels respond by denying religious leanings, this is a more definite case of secularism. Finally, actions may speak louder than words; if separatist groups are at odds with religious institutions, resulting in competition, critiques, or violence, this is yet another measure of secularism.

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Why does secularism matter? Finding an anomaly, where there are no appeals to religion, helps us understand how religion is mobilized. A secular conflict may be easier to solve. Religion is deeply held and is difficult to compromise; if a group believes it is fighting for its material as well as its spiritual existence, it is less likely to accept a bargained peace and it is more likely that the fighting will be intense. A secular conflict may also be easier to contain because it lacks many of the transnational linkages which religious struggles often enjoy. Finally, by understanding the lack of religious elements in a conflict, it makes clearer the elements which are the cause; in the case of Aceh, economic exploitation and human rights abuses.

Having discussed secularism, religious conflict should also be defined. Donald L. Horowitz provides a useful threshold for defining racial conflict: “any conflict can be described by its participants as ‘racial’... unless it can be shown that [race] adds to its intensity, the distinction should be dropped altogether.”6 The first step in defining a religious conflict is determining whether or not faith adds to the intensity of the fighting. A religious conflict is characterized as one which involves religious actors, religious symbols, religious goals, religious institutions, foreign religious communities, and religion is the primary method of differentiation between groups. The importance of religion in conflicts should not surprise those familiar with history or with the recent resurgence of religion. Such trends are summed up by John L. Esposito and John O. Voll:

The global tendency towards desecularization has challenged the presuppositions of modernization, the progressive Westernization and secularization of societies which had been articulated as inevitable evolutionary principles of development.7

6 Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 16.
The global religious resurgence, most notably in Islam, makes understanding the place of religion in conflict an important endeavour.

In light of the growing interplay between religion, politics, and conflict, this paper speaks directly to two themes. The first is providing a peaceful case of Islam in a longstanding conflict. Since the time of the crusades, Islam has been perceived as eternally entwined with war. Terrorist attacks and the Islamic resurgence have increased the perception of a militant Islam. Much of the Western world believes that political Islam means “returning to a medieval past and posing a threat to the West.” As noted by David D. Newsom, “if the public perceives the people of a country or region as hostile, cruel, greedy, or strange, establishing positive policies toward those people becomes very difficult.” By treating Islam as the enemy, one runs the risk of deepening the threat perceived by a religious population and nurturing a self-fulfilling prophecy. In Aceh, religious leaders exist outside of the conflict and have the potential to act as peace builders. An exception to militant Islam, especially one where conflicts have become increasingly religious, provides valuable insight.

Another important lesson offered by Acehnese Islam is its potential for peace building. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith's *Religion and Peacebuilding* opens by citing that “in some failed states, where centralized authority has broken down altogether, organized religion has remained intact as the only institution possessing a measure of

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credibility, trust, and moral authority among the population at large." Religion is one of few sources of popular legitimacy in conflict environments, with leaders acting as mediators, consciences, educators, observers, and judges. Many scholars emphasize the long history of religious mediation in Islamic societies, beginning with the prophet Mohammed in Medina. Mohammed Abu-Nimer believes that if religion is indeed a catalyst for conflicts, it must also be brought into peace talks if a lasting justice is to be found.\textsuperscript{11} This speaks to the trends of decentralized, track two negotiations as well as the ownership and practicality of working with community leaders. Aceh provides a promising example; here, religion is not a catalyst for conflict, allowing for religious leaders to act as neutral observers. In sum, helping to see what makes a conflict secular can open the door for religion to be a source of stability.

My goal is to find the cause of secularism in the Aceh conflict. Having stated my research question and hypotheses, defined key terms, and emphasized the potential of my research, I move to methodology—the final brick in the foundation before I begin my analysis of separatism and secularism.


Chapter 2  Methodology

Political scientists must pay attention to research methodology, even in the thick analysis of area studies. This is the advice of King, Keohane, and Verba, who note that “nonstatistical research will produce more reliable results if researchers pay attention to the rules of scientific inference.”\(^{12}\) Taking this advice to heart means that small ‘N’ area studies must be conscious of building, testing theories which are falsifiable, and speaking to broader trends. In this section I explain my use of case study and comparative methodologies and justify my case selection.

First though, I respond to possible critiques of a formal focus on methodology at all. Ian Shapiro is critical of too much methodology, suggesting that research should be ‘problem-driven’ as opposed to ‘method-driven.’ This is based on the critique that most studies are “detached from the great questions of the day and focused instead on what seems methodologically most tractable.”\(^{13}\) Shapiro is concerned that strict methodology forces problems to conform to theory, not to reality. I respond that my study is problem-driven; it is about understanding a real conflict. The methodology in my study serves to increase the validity of my observations, guiding but not deciding my findings.

Case Study and Comparative Methodologies

My analysis is a small ‘N’ comparative study which includes a dominant case study that best represents the puzzle I seek to solve compared with three other cases. This ‘weighted comparative’ approach necessitates some discussion of case study and comparative methodology. My approach is influenced by Harry Eckstein’s defense of

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\(^{13}\) Ian Shapiro, “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What’s Wrong with Political Science and What to do about it?” Political Theory, Volume 30, Issue 4 (August 2002), 597.
case studies and their potential contributions to political theories. It remains true that many political scientists who use case studies "appear to have no views at all, or only ambiguous views, on the role that case studies can play in theory building."\(^{14}\) Eckstein argues against the perception and practice of case studies as atheoretical ventures, offering a useful typology of different forms of case studies and their contribution to building and testing theory. In ascending importance, they are: Configurative case studies (descriptive narratives with few facts and little organization, basically without theory), disciplined-configurative case studies (configurative studies which illustrate theories but do not offer formal theoretical insight), heuristic case studies (case studies meant to sow the seeds for further study by disproving, clarifying, or redirecting an existing theory), plausibility probes (trial runs prior to a vigorous test), and crucial case studies (formally testing or building theory). Eckstein believes that by disaggregating different forms of case study, one gains greater precision, and motivates academics to explore crucial case studies, the most rare and useful form.\(^ {15}\)

This typology offers a useful way to disaggregate my case studies according to their purpose for this study. Historical Aceh, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines act as disciplined configurative case studies. Disciplined-configurative case studies are useful if "the interpretations of the case are shown to be logically compelled

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\(^{15}\) This typology should not be considered a product of Eckstein alone. First, Sidney Verba is credited by Eckstein for much of the terminology. Additionally, Arend Lijphart offers a similar classification system (atheoretical, interpretive, hypothesis-generating, theory-confirming / infirming, and deviant case studies) which predates Eckstein's. In fact, Lijphart's typology is created in reaction to Eckstein's own study of Norwegian political systems. However, I feel Eckstein's classification offers a more useful tool to categorize my use of case studies.
by the theories."\(^{16}\) I will not use these case studies to build new theories, but instead to illustrate existing theories of religious mobilization. By demonstrating the norm and highlighting an exception, these studies have more direction than configurative case studies. I do not limit my inquiry to a simple narrative, but instead focus on religious change during colonialism and establish that religious mobilization had a high probability of occurring. For disciplined configurative case studies, “information is interpreted as a confirming case for the regularities predicted by the theory.”\(^{17}\) These cases “have feedback effects on theorizing” while not explicitly formulating new concepts.\(^{18}\)

Admittedly, this study is centred on the current Aceh conflict. Aceh represents two of Eckstein's forms of case study, differing according to the body of theory I am speaking to. My study touches on two bodies of theory which will be explained later in the essay: The instrumentalist – primordialist debate and the sources of religious resurgence during times of uncertainty. The instrumentalist – primordialist debate seeks to explain the persistence and mobilization of ethnic identity either as products of leaders or of deeply-held internal values. For this debate, Aceh acts as a heuristic case study because my goal is not to describe the conflict or to test theories, but rather to consider the relationship between the theoretical bodies, sewing the seeds for further theory-building and suggesting how they may be relevant to related bodies of literature.

Regarding the religious change literature, Aceh serves as a crucial case study. My goal is to test existing theories and isolate reasons for an anomaly. As suggested by

\(^{16}\) Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” 103.
Eckstein, a crucial case study should focus on ‘most likely’ cases, where one expects a phenomenon to take place but does not. This is similar to Lijphart’s deviant case study, one that runs contrary to established norms, useful because it will “uncover additional variables that were not considered previously.”\textsuperscript{19} If one expects the Aceh conflict to become religious and it does not, this adds to theories of religious change by asking why.

At this point, I diverge from Eckstein, who believes that ‘most likely’ cases are “tailored to invalidation.”\textsuperscript{20} This line of reasoning was made famous by Karl Popper, who believes that once falsified, a hypothesis is removed from the field of possibilities and scientific knowledge progresses.\textsuperscript{21} But falsification does not necessarily result from finding a case where a theory comes up short; “every interesting social science theory has at least one observable implication that appears wrong.”\textsuperscript{22} I am not seeking to deny that communities usually become more religious during times of uncertainty or that separatist conflicts frequently evolve religious traits. Instead, I investigate an instance where religion has not become salient in order to qualify existing theories and search “for their bounds of applicability.”\textsuperscript{23} Lijphart shares this approach, condemning the “erroneous tendency to reject a hypothesis on the basis of a single deviant case” suggesting that a deviant case “refines and sharpens existing hypotheses.”\textsuperscript{24} My goal is not to destroy existing theories, but instead to qualify and improve them.

My study is not entirely based on the case study method, but instead a compromise between it and the comparative approach, defined as “a method of

\textsuperscript{20} Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” 119.
\textsuperscript{22} King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 101. For example, rational choice theories have been disproven, but nonetheless survive because they are helpful tools in explaining the world.
\textsuperscript{23} King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 101.
\textsuperscript{24} Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” 686 and 692.
discovering empirical relationships among variables." It would indeed be difficult to understand the case of Aceh without some form of comparison. While appreciating his typology, King, Keohane, and Verba are highly critical of Eckstein for believing that a single case, which he defines as "a single measure on any pertinent variable," can be important for testing theory. A single case fails to demonstrate relationships between variables, however by including three disciplined configurative case studies, the deviant case of Aceh becomes clearer and my study gains greater leverage. Decades after his article was published, Eckstein himself came to a similar conclusion: "I have come around to a somewhat modified view...that matched comparisons of cases selected for theory...are even more telling for [testing] theory."

With only one observation, research design falls prey to inferential problems: Random variations, errors, selection bias, omitted variables, and other pitfalls. Instead of using a single case study, I include four, but even here I include many observations because "what may appear to be a single case-study, or a study of only a few cases, may indeed contain several observations." In this study, historical Aceh is divided into three eras, while unrest in Thailand and the Philippines also includes colonial, secular, and religious phases. The current case of Aceh is similarly problematized. If my contention were only that the conflict is secular, contemporary Aceh would serve as a single data point. But the conflict is contested ground between several actors, classes, regions, and stages, thus several observations have been found within the single case.

25 Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," 683.
26 Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," 85.
28 King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 208. In his case study on diplomacy in the Vietnam War, Stephen Walker overcomes the N = 1 problem through "the explicit conceptualization of different levels of decision and levels of interaction implied by [several theoretical] models." See "The Management and Resolution of International Conflict in a 'Single' Case," 301.
Inferential problems creep into all research designs, but by increasing the number of observations so that measurement errors are averaged out are made less dangerous. Why not move one step further and make use of a large ‘N’ design? First, one can “gain new knowledge of the relationship among specific cases by using broader comparison.” Even if my goal was to understand only the Aceh conflict, comparing it to a large number of cases would illustrate how it compares to separatism writ large. Second, quantitative analysis benefits from simplification, ignoring differences between cases to focus on central processes. All studies simplify to some degree; not even the most elaborate description “comes close to capturing the ‘blooming and buzzing’ of the real world.” Simplified quantitative studies are easier to replicate, verify, and improve upon by a greater number of researchers, all central goals of scientific inference.

Eckstein critiques quantitative studies as “complex, weak, and much-qualified by ill-fitting variables.” Quantitative researchers often lack control over the sources of their data, whereas qualitative researchers rely on familiarity with the direction of the bias in existing data. The contextual knowledge offered by small ‘N’ analysis “is a requisite for avoiding simplifications that are simply wrong.” The familiarity that comes with studying a small number of cases helps to combat inferential problems, offering “an alternative form of leverage in dealing with issues of validity.” Macro-level studies often overlook or cannot explain mixture effects, path dependency, endogeneity, or omitted variables, which can be recognized with enough attention to causal processes.

29 David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” World Politics, Volume 49 (1996), 64.
30 King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 43.
31 Eckstein, “Introduction to Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” 117.
32 King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 43.
The nature of my study demands a small ‘N’ analysis. Qualitative research is a necessary first step to providing the discipline with valid data on an under-researched case. Further, I wish to understand the process of religious mobilization in separatist conflicts. Simplification, which is so useful for macro-level studies, would obscure the very details which I seek to capture. A large ‘N’ study would “describe the results of the change, not the mechanisms of it.”34 This approach may reveal that the Aceh conflict is secular, but could not easily say why. Finally, recent trends in political science demand a return to regional expertise through area studies. Political science has moved towards the methodology of economics, which focuses on rational choice, ignoring cultural and individual context. Francis Fukuyama warns that “to understand what kind of political actors might emerge in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, we don’t need math or game theory; what we need is an up-to-date understanding of the ethnic, religious, and tribal structures of the country.”35 Area studies require experience, linguistic ability, networks, and other investments I have begun to make in Southeast Asia.

Case Selection

This brings me to case selection. Even within the small ‘N’ framework, I could compare Aceh with Ireland, Spain, Kurdistan, Ogoniland, or Quebec. Diverse comparisons in terms of geography and culture could bring greater leverage for my conclusions because I would speak to a wider universe of cases. By remaining in Southeast Asia, I am in danger of discussing a phenomenon which is unique to this region even if my findings are accurate. Why limit my focus to Southeast Asia?

First, I have greater familiarity with the cases, bringing experience, networks, and resources from the field, resulting in more credible observations. More importantly, selecting similar cases is appropriate so that I may control for exogenous variables. Through Mill’s Method of Difference, I approximate the experimental method, where the researcher compares similar cases which differ by treatment (same religion or secular rebels). To be successful, the “instances which are to be compared with one another must be exactly similar, in all circumstances except the one we are trying to investigate.”

This approach is also advocated by King, Keohane, and Verba, who argue that because one cannot rerun history after applying a treatment—the only way to prove causation—one can come close by finding cases which are “alike in as many respects as possible, except for the key explanatory variable.”

Limiting my cases to Southeast Asia allows some factors to be partially controlled for. All of the cases I explore are violent separatist conflicts taking place on the periphery of their respective Southeast Asian nations. These are, in Horowitz’ terminology, “rump regions”, ethnically homogeneous locales which are difficult to control and represent the most likely cases of secession. There are, of course key differences. According to a typology provided by Joseph Rothschild, southern Thailand and the Philippines are cases of dominant majorities with subordinate minorities, separated by religion and culture. Aceh, on the other hand, is less obviously dissimilar to Java and is in a country with numerous ethnic minorities; a case of a dominant plurality.

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36 Mill, A System of Logic, 430.
37 King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 200.
38 Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 266.
"versus an aggregation of peripheral ethnic segments." In general though, the cases are comparable. The assumption of unit homogeneity, so dangerous in political research, is less problematic in like cases. This is why I favour treating some historical eras as separate cases or at least separate observations: Dividing a single case into regions or temporal eras approximates scientific control. As noted by Lijphart, "the advantage of intra-unit comparison is that inter-unit difference can be held constant" My comparisons do not approach the validity of a controlled experiment, but are satisfactory within the confines of the discipline.

In sum, this study uses a weighted comparative methodology, with three case studies used to illustrate a theory and build the case that Aceh is a puzzle. Aceh represents a deviant case to test the literature on religious change.

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40 Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," 689.
Chapter 3 The Debates

This chapter reviews two related theoretical bodies which help explain the role of religious identity in conflicts. The first debate focuses on the origins of ethnic identity, commonly labeled as instrumentalism versus primordialism. The second debate focuses on how and religious mobilization occurs; this body of literature builds on, illustrates, and qualifies the previous debate. This leads me to a third source of religious mobilization, from within the Islamic faith. My goals are to review dominant perspectives and demonstrate that not only is religious change a common response to sociopolitical upheaval, but specifically that one should expect Islam to become more political in response to civil conflict than other faiths.

Sources of Ethnic Identity

Where does ethnic identity come from and how is it mobilized? Ethnicity is derived from a sense of commonality or difference, ‘us’ or ‘them’. It may include myths of common origins, sacred territory, shared history, elements of common culture (customs, language, gender roles, and religion), and is confirmed by a sense of awareness. Mobilization is a reaction to the growing political importance of certain traits. This usually occurs in response to events that have generated a new political awareness, heightened emotions, and uncertainty.

Comparativists often use several overlapping theories in reference to ethnic identity, creating a need to group these related concepts. In one sense, the debate can be viewed as instrumentalism versus primordialism, asking if ethnic identity is constructed by leaders or if it is deeply embedded within the group. Most writers have reached the consensus that the phenomena cannot be explained by a single approach. Donald
Horowitz argues that monocausal approaches are “guaranteed a partial character,” while Joseph Rothschild agrees that “monocausal explanations of phenomena and exclusive claims for but one line of identification and cleavages are likely to prove distortive.” Each approach is limited, speaking to different aspects of ethnicity. Writers respond to the latter problem not by grouping the categories, but by creating new ones such as social construction and social psychology, resulting in a field which is immensely complicated. Such approaches are commonly framed in opposition to dominant theories, when they usually refer to different aspects of ethnic mobilization. Instead of reconceptualizing or refining existing categories, writers have Balkanized them.

The distinctions offered by rival theories should not be eliminated, but it is useful to group them in some fashion. I place sub-theories in two containers: ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. ‘From above’ refers to sources of ethnic mobilization from leaders or structures, including approaches such as instrumentalism, constructivism, and structuralism. ‘From below’ refers to sources of ethnic mobilization from the public, including approaches such as primordialism, psychology, and social constructionism.

**From Above**

**Instrumentalism:** Ethnic identity is often a tool for leaders to unify and mobilize their community. Instrumentalism is subject to a number of interpretations. A purist

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43 For instance, psychological explanations for ethnic change do not oppose primordial approaches; psychology explains why primordial bonds endure. Ernst Haas charges that ethnicity theorists write “as if no previous work had been done on the dynamics of social solidarity and fragmentation.” According to Haas, theorists have also failed to establish common terms and frequently fail to place their work in the context of previous studies. Ernst Haas, “What is Nationalism and Why Should We Study It?” *International Organization*, Volume 40, Issue 3 (Summer 1986), 714.
44 These terms are inspired by Horowitz, who explains that instrumentalism and modernization are “more about conflict at the top than at the bottom of societies.” Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*,134.
position views ambitious leaders as tricking the masses into believing in ethnic identity, a ‘false consciousness’ approach where culture is a manipulation serving to obscure class differences. A more moderate variant gives greater agency to the public, where ethnic identity is held among the masses and shaped by leaders.

Rothschild is one of the foremost instrumentalist thinkers. His argument is premised on the idea that ethnic conflict is the creation of human beings, not of innate cultural differences. To move a trait from being ‘what a group does’ to ‘what a group is’ requires some form of external stimulus. Groupings are not natural and can be altered because they are “the historical products of the political institutions, the state, that have shaped them into such peoples.” He adds that “ethnic consciousness and assertiveness do not flow automatically out of primordial culture or naturalistic data and differences but that they are products of political entrepreneurship.” For Rothschild and other instrumentalists, leaders are the key ingredient in defining and mobilizing ethnic identity.

Constructivism: Constructivism is an over-arching theoretical perspective which can refer to both top-down and bottom-up approaches. On one hand, it can be the method by which instrumentalism operates, where elites create symbols, invent history, and promote other traits which are internalized by the public. Then again, constructivism—or social construction—can also describe the popular reconceptualizing of traits already held by the public, which will be explored below. Both streams are prominent in major constructivist works such as Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Anderson

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45 Rothschild is clear that instrumentalism explains but one aspect of ethnic identity. His research focuses on instrumentalism but does not denigrate primordialism, citing a form of academic division of labour. Far from discounting ethnicity as just one form of identification, Rothschild argues that because it is such a deeply held marker, it is superior to class or occupation for use by elites. In fact, politicized ethnicity frequently comes to overwhelm political leaders.


argues that once popular nationalism took root in Europe, the nationalist model could “be
imitated, and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit.”

Constructivism from above is ‘Official Nationalism’, the willed merger of nation and
empire “in reaction to the popular nationalist movements proliferating in Europe.”

Official nationalism is state policy, promoting official vernaculars, history, and culture to
build a national identity. Leaders create, expand, and refine national identity for the sake
of chiseling out a modern state and defining their constituency.

John Hutchinson argues that ethnicity is often a product of cultural elites, such as
artists, scholars, teachers, and religious leaders. Cultural elites are closer to the public
and do not necessarily stand to gain materially from ethnic consciousness. These actors
look to the past for inspiration, but should not be mistaken as looking backwards, evoking
“a golden age as a critique of the present, with the hope of propelling the community to
ever higher levels of development.” This milder variant of constructivism is more
gradual than official nationalism.

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49 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism

50 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 86. Anderson credits this typology to Hugh Seton-Watson. Ernst
Haas has criticized Anderson for ignoring a wide body of early comparativist literature which is
responsible for many ideas presented in Anderson’s chapter on official nationalism, including work by
Hans Kohn, Charles Tilly, John Plamenatz, Arnold Toynbee, and Elie Kerdourie. Kohn labels the
dichotomy as rational, pluralist nationalism of the west versus the authoritarian nationalism of the east,
while Tilly draws a line between slowly emerging nationalisms and instant nationalisms.

51 Thongchai Winichakul’s Siam Mapped explores the manipulation of cartography and culture by Siamese
Monarchs in the colonial era, focusing on the dual use of the term ‘border’ for both geography and
ethnicity. In the late 19th century, the Siamese court established programmes which brought peripheral
areas under Thai law, forcing allegiance to Thai monarchs, Buddhism, language, food, utensils, dress,
haircuts, art, architecture, and more. Assimilation expanded national borders, now well codified by
official maps and satisfying the requirements of the European nation-state. Thongchai Winichakul,

52 John Hutchinson, “Moral Innovators and the Politics of Regeneration: the Distinctive Role of Cultural
Nationalists in Nation-Building,” in Ethnicity and Nationalism, edited by Anthony D. Smith (Leiden:

53 Anderson also stresses the role of cultural elites in the rise of popular nationalism in Western Europe.
Even Anthony D. Smith, who is critical of top-down approaches, appreciates the role of “modern,
**Structuralism:** This refers to broad political and economic systems which have an influence on the behavior of political actors. Structural approaches emphasize the contexts in which leaders are more likely to mobilize ethnic identity. It includes aspects of much larger bodies of theory, such as modernization and institutionalism. Instead of discussing each of these broad approaches, I focus on only those aspects where structures permit ethnic mobilization. The early work of Samuel Huntington best describes the effects of modernization on ethnic mobilization, where “it is not the absence of modernity but the efforts to achieve it which produce political disorder.”

Huntington argues that when social mobilization outpaces the development of political institutions, groups based on identity will rise under the control of counter-elites and challenge state order. The dangers of modernization are especially felt in rapidly developing, poor, multiethnic societies; destroying “the unity of states whose population is already divided into several groups.”

If political institutions lack the ability to absorb newly mobilized communities, such groups will be forced to work outside of it.

For Huntington, modernity destroys old political systems and frequently fails to establish new ones, leaving a vacuum for ethnic mobilization by modernized leaders who lack access to political institutions. The uncertainty which results from modernization makes the public more willing to embrace ethnic identities. If institutions are illegitimate, monopolized by a single group, lack input mechanisms, or are corrupt, they will be unable to accommodate these groups. In his historical institutionalist approach to ethnic conflict in Indonesia, Jacques Bertrand argues that when groups “are denied such rationalist intellectuals” in defining the form taken by a given ethnic identity. Anthony D. Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians,” in *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 68.

institutional channels, violence is more likely.\textsuperscript{56} The Indonesian system lacked the ability to accommodate ethnic nationalism, resulting in decades of tension. Bertrand makes a valuable contribution to structural arguments by including Paul Pierson's critical juncture approach. Here, outside forces act as sparks to ignite years of discontent. In sum, structural forces will dictate when ethnic mobilization is more likely to occur; rapid social change and uncertainty, combined with closed political systems and timing, create windows through which instrumentalism operates.

Instrumentalism shows how leaders can use identity "for the purpose of altering or reinforcing systems of structured inequality between or among ethnic categories."\textsuperscript{57} By viewing ethnicity as top-down, I avoid portraying identity as a mere tool. Elites are more than villains; they compete with others, require tools, and depend on context. But the picture is far from complete. Top-down processes explain the mobilization of identity, but are weak on its origins. For this reason, I turn to ethnicity from below.

\textit{From Below

\textbf{Primordialism:} Ethnic identity is rooted in ascriptive traits such as the individual, the family, the community, and its customs. Identity speaks to important questions, such as 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?' For the primordialist, "a common religion or a common language is what knits people together."\textsuperscript{58} Like instrumentalism, primordialism takes several forms. The strictest version focuses on timeless sanguineal relations and is rooted in the concept of race. A softer form of primordialism sees ethnicity as socialization: a creation of the family or community, norms passed down from generation

\textsuperscript{58} Horowitz, \textit{Ethnic Groups in Conflict}, 15.
to generation in the form of customs, heritage, history, and ways of life. Although identity is not immune from change, core traits manage to survive over time because they provide meaning in a chaotic world.

How can such a theory respond to change, namely political mobilization or conflict? For primordialists, changes are not recent inventions so much as they are recent incarnations of centuries-old forms. Anthony D. Smith deserves to be quoted at length:

Even if elements of ethnicity are constructed and reconstructed and sometimes just plain invented, the fact that such activities have been operating for centuries, even millennia, and that several ethnie while changing their character have nevertheless persisted as identifiable communities over long periods, suggests that we ignore the presence and influence exerted by such communities on the modern nations at our peril. 59

Smith is critical of the view that ethnic and national identities are recent creations. Ethnicity has been a dominant form of human organization “from the early third millennium BC,” with marked consistency that cannot be explained by instrumentalism. 60 Smith argues that ‘invention’ “must be understood [as] a novel recombination of existing elements.” 61 That there is continuity between ancient and modern forms of identification suggests that identity is a deeply held, core value.

Several writers cite that national identity is a recent invention, a product of modernity which imitates the more organic experience of Western Europe. Smith takes careful note of such statements, where theorists frequently add that nationalism consistently finds resonance with local culture and has taken root around the world. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm uses the term ‘invented traditions’, which he believes must

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59 Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians,” 74-75.
61 Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians,” 72.
“establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” This qualifier would seem to partly undermine his project; if these new traditions are invented, how are they also historical? The near universality of national identity and its continuity over time suggests that it is a very human experience. For Smith, the concept of Europeans inventing new forms of social organization which groups around the world naively embrace is as much a myth as the national identities critiqued by constructivists.

Social Psychological: Psychological explanations for ethnicity, where one’s identity is a function of a need to belong or survive, figure prominently in the literature. The advantage of the bottom-up perspective is that psychological approaches can be grouped with primordialism despite their differences. The dominant psychological explanation is closely related to primordialism. If ethnic groups have existed throughout history and show no signs of relenting, identity must be valued by its holders. Ethnicity provides security, certainty, understanding, relationships, and family, all essential psychological benefits. This perspective is a foundation for primordialism, explaining the motivation to retain core traits.

A second variant of the psychological approach is related to modernization theories, claiming that psychological need can be more powerful according to its context. Here, a greater psychological desire to belong grows in reaction to rapid sociopolitical upheaval, especially from competition between ethnic groups. For the popular nationalisms of Europe, the fall of religion and dynasties alongside the rise of republics and technology created a feeling of dislocation among the public; “the search was on, so

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63 Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians,” 73.
64 This borders on functionalism: Because ethnic identity exists, it must have value and it must be desirable.
to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together.\textsuperscript{65}

This hole was filled by ethnic and national identities, compensating for the security that came with the ascriptive social positions of feudal systems.\textsuperscript{66}

Horowitz exemplifies this psychological / contextual approach, focusing on feelings of group entitlement which result from contact between communities and their perceptions of unequal development. He sees competition among ethnic groups for the benefits of modernity as igniting a deep sense of identity and ethnic solidarity. Ethnic mobilization is largely a result of perceived entitlement and survival, where "positional group psychology" is a response to "the fear of domination by ethnic strangers."\textsuperscript{67} The importance of psychology and identity changes according to context; rapid socioeconomic change creates an environment where primordial traits are more valued, creating feelings of entitlement among groups.\textsuperscript{68}

**Social Constructivism:** Imagined communities have already been introduced as including popular and official variants. The former is a bottom-up process, a product of a population with growing feelings of solidarity. For Anderson, popular nationalism is a creation not of leaders, but of "a complex crossing of discrete historical forces."\textsuperscript{69} These forces include print media and the drive of a capitalism which responds to the demand of linguistic communities. Ethnic identity is viewed as an awakening to linguistic and

\textsuperscript{65} Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.
\textsuperscript{66} Anderson’s assertion that nations are recent creations contradicts primordialists such as Smith, who would likely respond by pointing out age-old affinities between groups based on common histories, myths, and cultures. As noted above, Smith is critical of constructivism, as each construction is based on a previous sense of identity.
\textsuperscript{67} Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 188.
\textsuperscript{68} Horowitz believes that his ‘Entitlement Theory’ “explains both elite and mass behavior” (226). Although his contribution is important, writers from several directions have criticized him. Where does this ethnic grouping originate? Why do some groups mobilize, while others fade away? Are elites limited to responding to mass sentiment?
\textsuperscript{69} Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.
cultural groupings, a shift facilitated by technological change. Far from top-down, this awareness has frequently forced monarchs to bend to popular culture at the expense of elite traditions. This constructivism is less a creation, as in the top-down process, but instead cements existing group identities, or for Smith, a recombination of existing traits. Anderson agrees that popular nationalism "is not the construction of ethnic-racial classifications, but rather their systematic classification."\(^70\)

Terence Ranger takes this approach in his study of white labourers in Africa during the colonial era. Europeans in Africa sought to distance themselves from locals and appear respectable to the Continent, inventing a series of imagined traditions. Miners imagined themselves as sacred guilds, while farmers—mere peasants in Europe—passed as heroic gentlemen pioneers.\(^71\) This process is hardly top-down, but instead popular differentiation. Ranger touches on the broader phenomenon where immigrant communities take on exaggerated identities of either their new or old communities. Because some groups may feel insecure or wish to differentiate themselves from locals, identities are constructed by the people who live them.

There are several theories which explain many aspects of ethnic identity, roughly corresponding to sources from above and from below. Neither approach alone is sufficient. Instrumentalism teaches a great deal, but fails to explain where identity comes from, why it persists, why it overwhelms other traits, or why groups sacrifice so much to belong. As summarized by Ashutosh Varshney, "for something to be manipulated by a leader when death, injury, or incarceration is a clear possibility, it must be valued as a

\(^{70}\) Anderson, Imagined Communities, 168.

good by a critical mass of people, if not by all." Horowitz responds that ethnicity is deep, "the ethnic group is not just a trade union." This leads to theories from below. Primordialist theories respond to many of the shortcomings of instrumentalism, placing ethnic identity above other forms of association and explaining why we hold these ties so tightly. However, primordialism cannot explain change as well as top-down theories do, including change as a result of intermarriage, economic shifts, multiple identities, population movements, or nation-building. Nor can primordialism explain how ethnicity may lead to conflict. For Rothschild, conflict does not grow out of difference. There is no inevitable clash of civilizations but instead certain stakeholders who make use of differences to further their own agendas.

Other approaches fill in the gaps. Constructivism answers how leaders, cultural elites, and the public come to define and transform identity. Social psychology shows why these traits resonate. Structuralist approaches such as institutionalism and modernization show how different contexts increase the likelihood of ethnic competition. At this point, it should be clear that each approach illuminates different aspects of a complicated process. Rothschild offers a useful synthesis. He concludes that group formation and mobilization is largely a top-down process but it is based on existing public sentiment and continued public acceptance. Once ethnic group mobilization has reached a certain threshold, "the psychological, cultural, and social reservoirs on which it

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73 Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 104.
74 Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 104.
originally drew serve to redouble and sustain it.” This responds to two questions which are frequently obscured: What is the source of ethnic identity and how is it mobilized for conflict? Quite generally, bottom-up approaches speak to the former, while top-down approaches speak to the latter.

**Religious Change & Uncertainty**

This section seeks to explain why religion frequently becomes a factor in separatist conflicts. I have already described why religion matters in conflicts. Although several forms of identity can mobilize a population during times of rapid change or conflict, religion is one of the most lasting and deeply felt. In most developing countries, religion is an ascriptive trait, “not a matter of faith but a given, an integral part of identity, and for some an inextricable part of their sense of peoplehood.” Religion has an important psychological function in difficult times because “it renders the strange familiar, the paradoxical logical.” If ethnic identity inspires more loyalty than class or occupation, religion is among the most deeply moving aspects of ethnic identity, not to mention the best organized.

*From Above*

Religion is a valuable resource for separatist leaders, a source of motivation, legitimacy, unity, authority, infrastructure, and foreign support for their cause. For fighters who face overwhelming odds, religion brings motivation, not only providing a sense of destiny and righteousness in this world, but also promising recognition in the

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76 Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 50.
afterlife. Religion makes wars seem legitimate; separatists are not fighting for mere territory, but for their souls and for god. This sense of a just war helps soldiers absolve themselves of the guilt of taking the lives of their enemy and makes compromise less likely. Religion also brings unity: Rebel armies are often plagued by dilemmas of collective action, where individuals may desire independence but are not willing to risk their lives. With religion, one feels greater social and moral pressure to fight, where failure to fight may result in banishment from the community or have repercussions for one’s soul. This makes defection less likely and recruitment easier. Conflicts motivated by religion also bring unity by drawing a sharp contrast between ‘us and them’, pulling all those of the faith into one camp and eliminating middle ground.

Another benefit is that religion helps cement the authority of leaders. Leaders who speak for God have greater resonance to populations in developing countries with weak political institutions, making it difficult for dissident factions and critical soldiers to question authority. Religion provides infrastructure, supplying separatists with symbols, networks, schools, buildings, organizations, and supporters. Finally, religion brings new possibilities for foreign assistance. Co-religionists abroad may feel ties with fellow believers, empathizing with groups who fight for religion more than those who fight for material reasons. Foreign involvement may take the form of moral support, diplomatic pressure, asylum, education, financial aid, and / or military assistance.

Theories from above help explain religious mobilization. Of all forms of identification, religion is rife with symbols, history, emotion, and examples— prime

Karen Armstrong notes that during the Crusades, beleaguered Christians “instinctively turned to religion and created the myth of the angelic warriors who were fighting on their side...they had a strong sense that God was, quite literally, marching with them.” Karen Armstrong, Holy War: the Crusades and their Impact on Today’s World (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), 159.
material for constructing rival nationalisms. Constructivism shows how leaders wield this tool. As for cultural elites, religious leaders have power over their communities and are easily identified. Finally, the uncertainty central to institutional and modernization theories is more intense during conflict, where groups are directly threatened.

Resources of several forms motivate political leaders to cultivate religious grievances in separatist conflicts. This said, there are several shortcomings to a top-down approach to religious mobilization. Leaders cannot create religious habits and dogma, they can only shape them. With nationalism, leaders are freer to pick and choose among symbols, myths, and history. With religion, such forms are codified, held by religious leaders, and are not easily manipulated by elites who lack religious legitimacy. The very reason that religion stands out as such a valuable source of power for elites is because it is so deeply held by the masses, suggesting the importance of primordial approaches.

From Below

Religion is a cultural trait that is primarily mobilized from below, becoming more important to people during times of crisis. This section focuses on Clifford Geertz' *Islam Observed*, which combines primordial, modernist, and psychological theories to explain the Islamic resurgence in response to colonialism and development. However I begin with Ernst Gellner, who asserts that it is elites who initiate religious and cultural revivalism when threatened by outside forces. For Gellner, revivalism occurs where

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79 Arskal Salim denies the common assertion that Sharia law is primarily a tactic for leaders to gain legitimacy, arguing it takes place ‘from below’. Looking at historical Aceh and Mindanao, Salim argues that “the politicization of Sharia by Muslim groups is a response to threat to their religious identity.” Arskal Salim, “Sharia from Below in Aceh (1930s-1960s): Islamic Identity and the Right to Self-Determination with Comparative Reference to the Moro Islamic Liberation Movement (MILF),” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Volume 32, Issue 92 (March 2004), 96.

leaders look back to a remote past in reaction to modern processes which they do not understand or cannot compete, as in several puritan or fundamentalist movements. Hutchinson provides a valuable critique of Gellner, noting this look to the past need not be considered a retreat. Instead, Hutchinson believes that many forms of revivalism use the past to find a distinct path to modernity. Gellner and Hutchinson agree that when communities are threatened, leaders turn to their religion and their history to organize the masses, but they differ on the direction this reaction must take.

Twenty years earlier, Geertz came to similar conclusions. He agrees that industrialization, colonialism, and conflict brings uncertainty and necessitates a revaluation of culture. However, he sees the growth of a modernist local culture as a bottom-up process, rooted in the population. Geertz suggests that communities have three paths to modernization. First, a community may abandon traditional beliefs, rejecting ‘backwards’ cultural practices and embracing totally new values such as democracy, fascism, or communism. Second, communities may modernize beliefs, picking and choosing between local and foreign traditions to find a modern, yet indigenous, national identity as in official nationalism. Finally, groups may purify beliefs, discovering traits that are simultaneously foreign and indigenous. Purification is a process unique to religious societies, where faith is internal to the community, but the specific lifestyles suggested by religious texts or by orthodox religious communities are alien. This is an increasingly common characterization of modernization in Muslim countries, where young adherents “combine modern organizational methods, traditional religious values, and highly populist appeals.”

This includes a look back to core religious traits as well as a look forward to how they apply to modern society.

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81 Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, 38.
Purification is a mixture of “radical fundamentalism and determined modernism”, a process which may occur in any religious community, but is mostly associated with Islam.

Geertz focuses on purification among Muslim societies in Morocco and Indonesia, radically different Islamic cultures which continue to arrive at similar modern orthodoxy. In both states, pressure from Europeans and secular nationalists prompted a turn towards the Koran, Islamic schools, Arabic culture, and foreign Muslim governments. One example of religious purification is the Hijab, a now common cultural feature which was previously alien in each region but because it is considered central to Islam, is also familiar. Other examples include mosque construction, ritual prayer, Halal food, fasting, Muslim greetings, and pilgrimages. Ironically, development has “moved religious faith closer to the center of peoples’ self-definition” by creating “the conditions in which an oppositional, identity preserving, willed Islam could and did flourish.” For Geertz, many Muslim societies have responded to modernization and colonialism by turning to their religion and adapting it to modern circumstances.

Modernist religious movements are created from below; although “externally stimulated, the upheaval is internal.” Geertz frequently uses the term ‘self-purification’, stressing that it is not a product of conscious foreign pressure or elite manipulation.

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82 Geertz, Islam Observed, 69.
83 Self-purification is rooted in religious schools which teach foreign-inspired, non-traditional curriculum. Just as native elites educated in European schools provided the backbone of anti-colonial movements, Southeast Asian Muslims educated in the Middle East form “a rising counter elite in search of legitimacy.” David Brown, “From Peripheral Communities to Ethnic Nations: Separatism in Southeast Asia,” Pacific Affairs, Volume 61, Issue 1 (Spring 1988), 68.
84 Deliar Noer comes to a similar conclusions, noting that opposition was found in two camps: colonial leaders and “religiously neutral nationalists.” Deliar Noer, The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia: 1900-1942 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973), 216.
85 Esposito and Voll describe Malaysian Prime Minister Hussein Onn, who was critical of the Islamic resurgence. This changed when his daughter returned from overseas ‘wearing curtains’, insisting that she was a modern Muslim and chastising her father. Esposito and Voll, Islam and Democracy, 128.
86 Geertz, Islam Observed, 65.
87 Geertz, Islam Observed, 65.
These changes are now generally referred to as the global Muslim resurgence, or *al-Sawha* (the awakening). Around the world, Muslim societies are undergoing an isomorphic change, rejecting local traditions as well as Western modernity and looking to the Koran and each other for inspiration. These Muslims “do not cling mindlessly to the past, nor do they espouse an anachronistic religious vision or utopia, but instead advocate a reconceptualization or reapplication of formative religious principles and values to contemporary life.” Modern Muslims “quest not for a return to the past but for the readaptation of modernity to a newly rediscovered identity.” Those who follow this path are generally young, educated persons who reject the decadence and corruption of both traditional and Western political systems. Unlike fundamentalism, the resurgence is usually peaceful, includes women, and is forward looking. At this point, the questions left unasked are the extent to which purification is unique to Muslim societies and more generally whether Islam has a greater propensity to become politically salient? After all, many faiths are enjoying a resurgence, what makes Islam unique? At this point, I address religious change from *within* Islam.

*From Within*

It is not unreasonable to expect that Islam has a greater capacity for political mobilization than other beliefs due to both the faith itself and trends within it. Thai

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91 Some note should be made of concepts such as Jihad and the idea that Islam is inherently violent. This idea merits little discussion as an internal aspect of the religion, which has more peace in it than war.
separatist leader Che Man notes that “ever since the establishment of the first Muslim community in Medina, Islam has always motivated Muslims to engage in political struggles, liberation movements, and wars.” As a result, for Southeast Asian separatist conflicts “Islam became the primary rationale for resistance to integration.” The logic here is that Islam, unlike many other faiths, is blatantly political—religion is “integral to all areas of life: politics, law, and society.” Where Christians assert that the true kingdom is not on this earth, Muslims have worked to create an ideal society since the days of Mohammed. For Islamic societies, the public/private distinction is less clear. As a result, one might expect Muslim communities to respond to upheaval with recourse to religion more than other communities.

Surin Pitsuwan notes that “Islam, more than other religions, is able to instill a sense of religious solidarity among its believers.” He refers to the Ummah, the community of Muslims which transcends national, racial, and tribal boundaries. This effects religious mobilization, where the solidarity which is so often an obstacle to social change is easier to generate. This also means that Muslims have an identity which is outside of the nation-state, challenging official nationalism with a strong, organized opposition. Islam does seem more likely to be mobilized in times of uncertainty due to some of its core tenets, such as its community of believers. However, even more

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93 Che Man, Muslim Separatism, 72.
important than elements internal to the faith are trends such as the Islamic resurgence and the War on Terror, which increase the likelihood of political Islam.

I do not intend to explain all Muslim conflicts as part of a homogeneous Islamic resurgence. I agree with Harold Crouch that these conflicts "can best be understood not so much as part of a world-wide Islamic revival but more in terms of the reaction of particular communities which happen to be Muslim." Islamic conflicts from Sudan to the Philippines are primarily based on local grievances. That said, researchers should not ignore feedback mechanisms between local purifications and the global resurgence. Modernist Islam began with the Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt in the 1930s, an organization which soon spread to the Middle East. The Brotherhood was founded on the belief that Islamic societies must become modern, but Western modernity required spiritual reformation. The group turned to social welfare projects, education, health care, and political parties and rejected traditional religious leaders. This served as a model for modernist Islam around the world. The resurgence expanded due to several isolated events, including the creation of Pakistan, the oil crisis, the Arab-Israeli Wars, the Iranian Revolution, the Afghan campaigns, and the War on Terror. Today, most Muslims around the world have embraced modern variants of the faith, with prayer, dress, language, social welfare, and religious politics occupying the minds of countless adherents in what is truly a religious resurgence.

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97 The return to Islamic texts is largely credited to the philosopher Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiya (d. 1328). Ibn Taymiya was disregarded by his contemporaries for his writings, which urged a return to texts and to avoid interpretation of leaders. It was not until the late 18th century that Ibn Taymiya was rediscovered by aspiring revivalists and helped model early Muslim organizations.
98 In Islam and Democracy, Esposito and Voll offer a compelling look at the resurgence and democracy. Besides looking at democratic traditions within the faith, he strongly cautions against actions against such groups, crackdowns which will foment fundamentalism. They suggest that if a system is truly democratic, and the population wants a more political face to their religion, we should expect a Muslim
The relationship between the social changes in particular Muslim communities and the global resurgence is mutually reinforcing. I believe that the Islamic resurgence is a collection of individual purifications, a phenomenon of the whole which feeds back into purification among its constituent parts. This means that purification among specific communities is accelerated by the resources and demonstration effects of other communities. As a result, the Islamic resurgence has its own momentum. Many Muslim communities have formed networks and organizations that direct the resurgence in other countries, namely Saudi Arabian Wahhabism, which funds Islamic programmes around the world. The existence of such aid increases the threat perceived by non-Muslim governments, whose reaction frequently serves to push Muslim communities further towards resurgence. The Ummah provides a push towards purification in addition to ongoing purification from below. This means that Islam, which already has a greater propensity for political mobilization than other faiths, now has an even greater likelihood of saliency due to its transnational momentum.

This chapter has reviewed a number of diverse theories, piecing together how ethnic traits persist, change, and are mobilized. An important catalyst for change, as explained by modernization and psychological approaches, is uncertainty. Because religion speaks directly to uncertainty, it can be expected to be more susceptible to mobilization than other traits. Islam has shown and can be expected to see greater politicization than other religions due partly to its ideology, but more due to recent trends and the momentum brought on by the global Islamic resurgence. Thus it can be asserted government. If one accepts different forms of democracy outside of the secular Western forms, Esposito and Voll predict that institutionalization will be the most effective check against radicalism.
that Muslim communities which feel threatened by outside forces are more likely to become politically active than other communities.

This chapter closes with the final point that conflict is likely to produce more marked, rapid purification than colonialism, modernization, or globalization alone. Uncertainty, threat, and fear are central to ethnic mobilization, and there are few sources of these more intense than civil conflict. Geertz is clear that purification is accelerated by war, citing the Java and Aceh Wars as examples where religious change approached "radical and uncompromising purism." Smith sums up this point in his famous statement that "war makes the state (and the state makes war)", where traumatic events such as prolonged conflict trigger profound changes in identity. In sum, religious purification is a natural product of a society facing uncertainty and violence, as the cases of historical Aceh, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines will demonstrate.

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99 Geertz, Islam Observed, 69.
100 Anthony D. Smith, National Identity (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 27.
Chapter 4 Case Studies

This section begins with three case studies: Historical Aceh, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines. In Eckstein’s terms, these are disciplined-configurative case studies. They are not purely descriptive, nor do they contribute to building theory. Instead, they are guided by and illustrate the theories of ethnic mobilization and religious conflict discussed in the previous chapter. Understanding how these theories play out will build a contrast to the current Aceh conflict, my fourth and most in-depth case study.

Historical Aceh

Aceh is located on the northwest tip of Sumatra. It is home to 4.5 million people, including 3.7 million Acehnese, 550,000 Gayo or Alas hill tribes, 200,000 Javanese transmigrants, and some Batak, Minangkabau, and Chinese. Approximately 99% of the population is Sunni Muslim. The population is concentrated along the coasts, with the mountainous interior home to several tribal groups. Historically, Aceh’s economy was based on pepper and other spices, as well as servicing traders passing through the Straits of Malacca. Today, Aceh’s economy is based on oil and liquid natural gas (from the northeast coast), black market timber and marijuana (from the interior), coffee, fishing, and palm oil.

Aceh was home to three conflicts prior to the 1976 uprising, each marked by a further turn towards a purified form of Islam. The first era (1524-1873) is Acehnese statehood, fighting sporadic wars against Portugal and local Sultanates. Of all regions in Indonesia outside of Java, Aceh has the most distinct history as an independent political and economic entity. It was the first region in Southeast Asia to convert to Islam, which

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101 Please see Figure 1, “Map of Aceh,” appendix.
took root in a culture with fewer Indic influences than its neighbours. But traditional Acehnese Islam was marked by animism and tribal politics as of the mid-sixteenth century. When Portugal took Malacca in 1511, Christian missionary activity and the persecution of Muslims resulted in an exodus to Aceh. This shifted powerful Muslim trading networks from Malacca to Aceh, bringing extensive contact with foreign Muslims and enabling rapid Acehnese development. Aceh experienced a renaissance in art, architecture, and philosophy. For the first time, Acehnese society tended to Islamic institutions such as the Haj and Friday prayer, obligations previously unknown.

While Acehnese society became increasingly Islamic, its political realm changed slowly, still coloured by traditional rivalries. Local kingdoms failed to find any common cause in response to Portugal, which was viewed as yet another local power. This changed in the late fifteenth century, when local kingdoms began to forge political alliances based on their common faith. This shift occurred because of Portuguese religious intolerance, growing trade, and the interaction of religious leaders between local kingdoms. For the first time, Islam played a crucial role “in providing an ideological basis for the Muslim struggle against the Portuguese.” This “Southeast Asian Islamic alliance” was strengthened in 1607 with the rise of Sultan Iskandar Muda.

In what is known as ‘the Golden Age of Aceh’, Iskandar Muda concluded a series of alliances with Muslim Empires abroad such as the Ottomans and Indian Sultanates, and appealed to regional religious communities for unified attacks against the Christian

102 This is likely due to the timing of Acehnese development, occurring later than other regional powers. Amirul Hadi, Islam and State in Sumatra: A Study of Seventeenth Century Aceh (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2004), 239.
105 Amirul Hadi, Islam and State in Sumatra, 30.
106 Amirul Hadi, Islam and State in Sumatra, 30.
Portuguese. Iskandar Muda sponsored massive celebrations of Friday Prayer, Ramadan, Id al-Fitr, and other events, inviting religious leaders from throughout the region. But religion did not yet colour politics completely, as the war with Portugal prompted Iskandar Muda to find diverse allies. Aceh found its strongest ally in the Dutch; together, they removed the Portuguese, with local Sultanates accepting Dutch rule provided they proved more tolerant than the Portuguese. For the next two centuries Aceh had an increasingly strong religious identity and an evolving political system.

The second era of Acehnese history (1873-1943) began with the Dutch invasion, “the biggest, bloodiest, costliest military operation in Dutch colonial history.” Prior to the invasion, the Sultan of Aceh sent pleas to the Turks, English, Russians, and Americans, describing Aceh’s position in legal terms, specifically the Anglo-Dutch Agreement of 1824, wherein Britain recognized Acehnese sovereignty. Acehnese envoys were rebuffed and the Dutch invasion began, largely a result of the British desire for Dutch expansion to block French ambitions. The Sultan led the initial fight and met with some success. Although he soon lost control of the towns, the Sultan resisted until his capture in 1904. But the majority of the resistance was independent of the Sultan, as leadership had effectively passed to the religious scholars (Ulama) by the 1880s.

The Dutch invasion was cruel, with troops massacring villagers and torching mosques. The Dutch relied on Christian soldiers from Eastern Indonesia and placed Christians in positions of power. Such actions mobilized the Ulama, religious teachers

107 Hadi notes that “Aceh is indeed known for having tried to establish diplomatic relations with Muslim states outside of the region.” He also notes that Acehnese armies were made up of Muslims from dozens of nations, with foreign Muslims coming to Aceh for trade, education, and as mercenaries.

108 Please see Amirul Hadi, Islam and State in Sumatra, 125.

109 James Siegel, The Rope of God (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 43. The Aceh-Dutch War also taught the Dutch guerilla tactics later used against Britain in the Boer War.
who provided the heart of Aceh’s resistance by organizing through the mosque and religious sermons, using faith to sustain what seemed like an impossible struggle. Consistent with expectations of religion in conflicts, “the idiom of Islamic martyrdom was the ingredient needed to inspire courage in the face of overwhelming odds.”

This era created a strong allegiance to religion, especially Islamic education which is still prominent today. Although severely weakened by the 1920s, the Ulama resistance lasted until World War Two, decades after the official surrender of the Sultan and 75 years after the initial invasion.

The Dutch had effective control of Aceh from the 1920s until the 1940s, an era which saw the Uleebalang (merchant class) collaborate with the colonial regime. Meanwhile, the Ulama was split between guerilla war and working within the Dutch system. In 1939, a group of Ulama organized the PUSA (Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh, All-Aceh Ulama Association). Beginning in 1941, the PUSA received arms and training in Penang from Japan; when the Japanese arrived in Aceh in 1943, the Dutch had already been defeated. The subsequent fall of Japan and the Dutch return allowed religious and military leaders such as Daud Beureueh to gain political power.

The Ulama had complete control of Aceh after World War Two, using this opportunity to eliminate Uleebalang collaborators in a brief, yet bloody civil war. In sum, the Dutch War had

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111 Ira Lapidus notes that Islamic education in Aceh is unique because “Muslim teachings did not remain an isolated phenomenon but became part of Acehnese society.” Acehnese religious schools are well-attended, a cause and effect of a deeply religious society. Ira M. Lapidus, A History of Muslim Societies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 475.
112 Reid puts Daud Beureueh’s popularity in terms similar to Geertz, arguing that the religious teacher’s use of modern organization and modern Islam was in competition with Indonesian groups such as Sarekat Islam. Whereas Sarekat Islam was politics dressed in Islam, Daud Beureueh “belonged to the authentic tradition of religious revival,” showing Aceh “a path that led forward rather than back.” Anthony Reid, The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 24.
created “a sense of intertwined regional and religious identity among the Acehnese.”

According to James Siegel, young volunteers would recite Koranic lines promising that those who give their lives in the Holy War are guaranteed paradise in the afterlife. This experience resulted in an Acehnese society with a strict form of Islam, one tied closely to military struggle and where the Ulama enjoyed considerable popular support.

The third era of Acehnese history refers to Indonesian Independence and its aftermath (1945-1959). At the end of World War Two, the Ulama dominated Aceh and gained substantial influence in the newly created Republic. When the Dutch returned to recapture their colony, Aceh was the only part of Sukarno’s Republic that remained free, an important event in the founding of Indonesia and crucial for its legitimacy. Acehnese capital even funded the first Indonesian embassies and the national airline. The Acehnese were among the strongest proponents of the Indonesian state, with leaders such as Beureueh claiming a common cause against “Dutch infidels” to unify Indonesians. For these reasons, Acehnese resistance to the Dutch is fondly recalled by Indonesian nationalists and “for precisely this reason, Acehnese secession is inconceivable.”

Daud Beureueh and the Ulama supported Sukarno with the understanding that Indonesia would become an Islamic state. But like most other postcolonial leaders, Sukarno was a secular nationalist. His vision of a centralized, secularized Indonesia was

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rejected by pockets of orthodoxy, resulting in the Darul Islam (House of Islam) Rebellion. The Rebellion began under the leadership of Kartosurwirjo in West Java in 1949, who proclaimed the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). Areas under NII control were referred to as Darul Islam, soon joined by Aceh, South Kalimantan, and South Sulawesi. These uprisings were united in their demand for an Islamic state, however they were primarily fuelled by local issues.

Sukarno dissolved Aceh’s provincial status and incorporated it into North Sumatra, marginalizing local leaders, giving Christians and Javanese positions of power, and eliminating local military units. This was a serious affront given the sacrifices Aceh had made during the struggle for independence. The Ulama-led Rebellion received strong support among the population “because of the respect they enjoyed among the Acehnese and because of their Islamic values and goals.” For Aceh, the Darul Islam Rebellion was mostly political, strongly religious, but “there was no significant support...for a separate Acehnese state.” The uprising was eventually diffused through political and cultural concessions from Jakarta, with Beureueh isolated by the late 1950s because he was unwilling to compromise. Aceh once again joined the Republic of Indonesia, this time with the understanding that although Indonesia would not be an Islamic state, the province of Aceh would operate according to Islamic law and values.

In her study of Acehnese art, Holly Smith notes that during the Dutch War, Aceh “underwent a religious ‘cleansing’ to separate orthodox Islamic beliefs from the

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unorthodox Western practices introduced by soldiers and traders.\textsuperscript{120} Early Sultans viewed Portugal in terms of traditional politics and responded to the Dutch by invoking international law. Meanwhile, as a result of uncertainty and threat, the public turned towards an increasingly purified Islamic faith and adopted foreign Islamic social practices. Success against the Portuguese and the Dutch relied on religious enthusiasm among the masses. Leaders who responded to this religious change such as Iskandar Muda and Daud Beureueh enjoyed tremendous popularity. The Darul Islam Rebellion is important because it confirms centuries of purification, where religious leaders enjoyed strong support of faithful masses which practiced a faith alien to that of most Indonesians.

**Southern Thailand**

In the ninth century, southern Thailand was part of the Hindu-Buddhist Empire of Sri Vijaya, Sumatra. By the eleventh century, local rulers converted to Islam and created the Kingdom of Pattani. By the seventeenth century, a declining Pattani became a tributary state of Siam. For the next two centuries, local rulers were forced to send gifts and recognize Thai power. This changed with pressure from European colonialists, when Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn etched Thailand’s borders from tributaries in the North, East, and South. At this time, there was no sense of Islamic identity in the South. Locals practiced an acculturated ‘folk Islam’, mixed with Indic and local traditions, while politics corresponded to age-old rivalries. The southern Kingdoms were incorporated into the Kingdom of Siam in 1902, confirmed by a treaty with Britain in 1909 which recognized Thai rule in exchange for recognition of British claims in Perlis, Kedah.

\textsuperscript{120} Smith, *Acehnese Art and Culture*, 12.
King Chulalongkorn eliminated traditional political and religious institutions in his new territory, fearing "the Malays could very well make troubles by appealing to their religion." Thai control resulted in a series of minor rebellions, but the Muslims made no unified response.

In 1938, Field Marshall Phibun embarked on an era of 'Thaification', changing the country's name to Thailand "on the grounds that it would signify that the country belonged to the Thais" and forcing minorities to accept an astonishingly vast and specific array of 'Thai' cultural traits. During World War Two, Thailand temporarily annexed the Malay states it had ceded to Britain forty years before, strengthening cultural and political linkages between regional Muslims. The end of World War Two brought few changes in Thailand's national model in the South. By the 1960s, southern Thailand was economically marginalized, controlled by Chinese capitalists, subject to transmigration, and threatened by an expanding central government. Continued Thaification, specifically the introduction of Thai curriculum and a centralized education system, caused further dissatisfaction. In 1968, several violent separatist organizations were formed, the most dominant being the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO).

Initially, PULO doctrine contained a mixture of socialism, Malay nationalism, and Islam. Its socialist aspects included symbols and rhetoric, an alliance with the Malayan Communist Party, and connections to communist rebellions throughout Thailand. Ethnic appeals were found in its usage of the local Malay dialect, irredentism with neighbouring Malay states, and an exaggerated history of local kingdoms.

121 Please see Figure 2, "Map of Southern Thailand," appendix.
123 David Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History (Hong Kong: Silkworm Books, 1984), 254.
124 Please see the PULO website, http://pulo.4t.com/.
According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the PULO’s claims have always been “more ethno-nationalist than Islamist.”

Regarding Islam, some separatist leaders were educated in Cairo and Mecca, Islamic symbols made their way into flags and posters, and appeals were made to foreign Muslim organizations. A look at PULO symbols helps to illustrate its various influences. The PULO Coat of Arms includes a flag based on Malaysia’s and is dotted with Arabic script, demonstrating its ethnic and religious foundations. The crest between the flags is clearly socialist, with bayonets and crossed below a single yellow star. Throughout the 1970s, the PULO became increasingly influenced by socialism. This was largely a result of realpolitik; the PULO depended on Southeast Asian communists for assistance and communism was the dominant language of resistance at the time.

Years of military abuse and failed assimilation have created a greater interest in Islam among the population. Surin Pitsuwan applies Geertz’ approach to southern Thailand, arguing that purification among majority ethnic groups in developing countries produces a more severe purification among religious minorities. Thai Official Nationalism and popular purification led to Buddhist nationalism that was posed as a model for Muslim populations. Muslim communities perceived Buddhist nationalism as a serious threat, sparking a turn toward religion as a means of cultural survival as well as a means to differentiate themselves from Thais. By the 1980s, Muslim education, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the construction of mosques, and dozens of Islamic social practices became widespread. The Thai Government attempted to improve the situation in the South, entering into negotiations with the PULO and giving greater recognition to Islam.

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126 Please see Figure 3, “PULO Flag and Coat of Arms,” appendix.
127 Surin Pitsuwan, Islam and Malay Nationalism.
Religious leaders took a prominent role in investigating human rights abuses and gained prominence in politics and education. The PULO continued to work with the government, make use of socialist rhetoric, and resist most outside Islamic influences.

In the 1990s, dozens of more extreme religious organizations arose, outbidding older, more secular groups. They were largely the creations of Mujahudin veterans returning from Afghanistan. In 1995, the GMIP (Gerakan Mujahidin Islamiyah Pattani) was formed in rural areas by Afghan veterans with the help of similar groups in Malaysia, such as the KMM (Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia). Other Islamic separatist organizations include the United Front for the Liberation of Pattani (BERSATU), Mujahidin Pattani Movement (BNP), Barisan National Pember-Basan Pattani (BNPP), and the Barasi Revolusi National (BRN). Islamic separatist organizations recruited through mosques, religious schools, and during the Haj, framing the Thai Muslim struggle as a purely religious conflict. In 1993, the New PULO was established, carrying out a series of high-profile attacks, including a shift from the PULO’s attacks on state institutions to attacking nightclubs and even Buddhist monks. The New PULO also aided the Jemaah Islamiyah’s attack on the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok in 1994. In January 2004, the Thai military responded to an assault by the New PULO with a series of attacks, killing hundreds inside historic mosques, abusing civilians, and suffocating 84 protestors in crowded trucks en route to detention centres after a November 2004 protest.

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129 The Haj became so important that the Thai Government opened a special intelligence unit for its embassy in Saudi Arabia. WK Che Man, Muslim Separatism: the Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 162.
The Organization of the Islamic Conference has applauded the Thai Government for growing more accommodating of Islam in recent years. However, the separatist cause survives, primarily in response to military abuse; over 800 people have died in the conflict since the January 2004 raid. Prime Minister Thaksin, head of the Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party, has been far from apologetic, blaming the rebellion on drugs and not acknowledging legitimate grievances. Islamic extremism and links to terrorism have succeeded in accelerating religious awareness, but have also discredited extremist separatists in the eyes of the public. Older groups lost support by failing to speak to Islam while newer groups are also losing support by moving towards terrorism and ignoring local issues. The conflict in southern Thailand has seen a large turnover among separatist groups and leaders, yet the discontent and Islamic identity of the people have grown steadily. The conflict has provided the fuel for an Islamic resurgence.

The Southern Philippines

Muslims in the southern Philippines have a similar story. Traditionally, Islam in the region was an acculturated blend of indigenous traits and did not offer a common identity to its adherents. Regional unity was especially weak; compared with Aceh and Pattani, the southern Philippines lack a history of powerful kingdoms. Regional unity did not grow until the arrival of the Spanish, who classified the people as Moros, a term and

130 Reuters. “Southern Thailand Unrest not a Religious Conflict: OIC” (7 June 2005).
132 For example, after the Thai military excesses in 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin dropped hundreds of paper cranes over the South with messages of peace in them. Demonstrative of Thaksin’s approach, the event was held to celebrate the King’s birthday, notes were written in Thai, and cranes are symbols of Thai Buddhist faith. Further, one special crane included a scholarship to a Thai University, signed by Thaksin himself. Kylie Morris, “Thais Drop Origami ‘Peace Bombs,’” BBC News (12 May 2004).
133 The growth of terrorism and links to foreign groups has prompted the denunciation of violence by many Thai Muslim religious leaders and several protests against violence from all sides. Please see International Crisis Group, “Southern Thailand: Insurgency, not Jihad.”
134 Please see Figure 4, “Map of Southern Philippines,” appendix.
perception derived from their own history. In the 1560s, a war between local rulers and the Spanish ensued over trading routes, with Muslim kingdoms finding early success due to their naval expertise. But the Spanish were victorious by 1661. The Spanish Philippines was ruled by the crown and the Catholic Church, with mass conversions, migration, and military assaults threatening Moro villages. This contributed to an early Islamic resurgence that “transcended the traditional identifications among Muslims” and provided organized, unified resistance to the Spanish.135

By the time of the Spanish-American War in 1899, the Moros and Catholic Filipinos shared great animosity, to the point that the Moros “expressed a preference for American to Filipino rule.” This led to the Bates Treaty, where Americans and Moros forged a loose alliance against the Spanish, and then against emerging Filipino Nationalists.136 The Americans granted the Moros their own province in 1903. Despite several small conflicts, many Moros continued to support the American administration with the hope of achieving an independent state. But the Americans had no such plans, as the eventual Philippine Republic included the Moro Province. Post-independence rule brought transmigration, Catholic education, and economic marginalization, with Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao gaining Christian majorities by the 1960s.137 By the 1980s, Muslims comprised less than 25% of the population of Mindanao.

A handful of Moro students attended Cairo’s al-Azhar University in the 1950s, many of whom returned to form local Islamic organizations. By 1968, several

136 Samuel K. Tan, Decolonization and Filipino Muslim Identity (Manila: Diliman University, 1989), 68.
137 This was partly a result of the Huk Rebellion, where communist former anti-Japanese guerillas took up arms against the government, demanding land reform and several other redistributive measures. To convince the rebels to demobilize, the government offered them large land holdings in Mindanao, resulting in large numbers of non-Muslim former guerillas settling throughout the southern islands.
independence movements were established, including the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).\textsuperscript{138} The MNLF immediately gained diplomatic and financial aid through Libya and forums such as the Organization for the Islamic Conference (OIC), which established an oil embargo against the Marcos regime for his treatment of Muslims.\textsuperscript{139} The OIC also funded scholarships for Moro students in Cairo and built schools in Mindanao. However, the OIC disappointed the MNLF by not supporting Moro Independence.\textsuperscript{140}

Despite Muslim political alliances, the MNLF also had strong leftist leanings. Its leader, Nur Misuari, was a devoted socialist.\textsuperscript{141} Under Marcos’ rule, communists and Moros were pushed even closer together, creating what Lela Noble refers to as “Islamic Socialism.”\textsuperscript{142} Although this partnership provided the MNLF with material support, it cost them popular support. MNLF leader Nur Misuari was abandoned by many colleagues who believed that “communism and the struggle of the Moros, of course, [were] not compatible.”\textsuperscript{143} Ethnic appeals also appeared; during negotiations with Marcos, the MNLF used the term ‘Bangsamoro’ in place of ‘Muslim’ in an attempt to downplay Islam and to portray themselves as an ethnic nation. This secular title was rejected by local religious groups, which in a series of protests demanded that they be identified as Muslim.\textsuperscript{144} Moros were increasingly turning towards Islam in response to years of conflict and corrupt local leaders; a 1983 survey found that over 60% of locals

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\textsuperscript{138} Please see the MNLF website for more information, http://mnlf.net/.
\textsuperscript{139} Noble, “The Philippines: Autonomy for the Muslims,” 105.
\textsuperscript{141} Zachary Abuza, Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 39.
\textsuperscript{142} Noble, “The Philippines: Autonomy for the Muslims,” 109.
\textsuperscript{143} Cited in Abuza, Militant Islam in Southeast Asia, 40.
\textsuperscript{144} Noble, “The Philippines: Autonomy for the Muslims,” 108.
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identified as Muslim before Moro, but Moro before Filipino. The region experienced a steady rise in Islamic education, mosque construction, and powerful religious teachers. As put by Noble, the legacy of Marcos was that the Moros became “more conscious of their Muslim identities and more assertive of their rights than they had been before.”

Aspinall notes that in Mindanao “there has been a trend for successive generations of separatists to espouse increasingly purist interpretations of Islamic doctrine.” In 1982, a group of foreign educated youths splintered from the MNLF to form the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF immediately sent hundreds of volunteers to fight in Afghanistan, which became symbolic of its struggle against the MNLF, which had connections to local communists. The MILF differs from the MNLF through its “promotion of Islamic ideals rather than the simple pursuit of Moro nationalist objectives.” It uses Islamic terminology and symbolism, utilizes Arabic script, is partly funded by “revolutionary zakat”, and organizes through the mosque. Its flag features Arabic script, as opposed to the MNLF flag, which features a traditional sword. The MILF also put considerably more resources than the MNLF into “securing diplomatic and material support form the outside Muslim world.” From the MILF, the smaller and more radical Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was formed in the 1990s. The ASG’s targets soon became more transnational than local, largely abandoning the separatist

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147 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
148 Please see MILF website, www.luwaran.com/. Figure 5, “MNLF and MILF Flags,” appendix.
150 Please see Figure 5, “MNLF and MILF Flags,” appendix.

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cause. Similar fates befell other splinters, such as the Islamic Command Council, Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization, and the MNLF-Reformist Movement.

Like the New PULO, the MILF and the ASG have lost some popular support because they have become too extreme. They have proven ties to Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda, establishing Camp Abu-Bakar, a training ground for international terrorists. The ASG is especially isolated, its activities comprised of purely criminal acts. Although the MILF has tried to sever its ties to terrorists after September 11, remnants of the camps continue to operate and attack Catholic communities. The International Crisis Group states that the alliance between the MILF and JI was always “more pragmatic than ideological.” Just as the MNLF formed an alliance with communists for material aid but lost popular support in doing so, the MILF has worked with JI and al-Qaeda and has recently returned to focusing on local issues. As noted by Aspinall, Muslim separatist movements “have become overtly Islamic, even Islamist, in orientation, without abandoning their basic nationalist orientation.” Local communities may support separatism or autonomy, but cannot relate to global fundamentalist activities.

Aceh was the first region in Asia to purify its faith, a result of Muslim traders and clashes with European powers. This foreshadowed changes in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines. Geertz observes that “cross and crescent florescences in the seventeenth century of Atjeh at the Northern tip of Sumatra” was a precursor for other

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152 Especially after the death of its leader in 1998, the ASG became more of a gang than a separatist group, focusing on kidnappings and extortion in place of political rebellion.
156 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
Muslim communities in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{157} None of these conflicts began with Islamic
goals in mind, in fact leaders consistently used traditional and Western approaches. The
psychological need to turn towards primordial traits such as religion was strengthened
during these conflicts; meanwhile the Islamic faith offered foreign resources with which
to construct local societies. New leaders managed to benefit from this change, but could
only shape sentiment so far without losing power. As described, separatist groups that
move too far towards global issues risk losing local support. The conflicts remain based
on local grievances, although they are fought in terms of Islam and appeal to the Ummah.

It should be clear why and how most separatist Muslim communities typically
turn towards religion, which becomes increasingly purified as conflicts endure. Aceh has,
as demonstrated, a history of religious conflict, strong religious leaders, and orthodox
Islamic traditions. Aceh has also been home to a decades-long violent separatist conflict,
one which against all odds has remained secular. Before speculating why, I will review
the conflict, its major actors, and the role of Islam.

\textbf{The Aceh Conflict}

I pick up at the end of the Darul Islam Rebellion, when Aceh was granted
provincial status and cultural autonomy, allowing the enforcement of Sharia law and
Islamic education. However, autonomy quickly eroded with the rise of the New Order.
Suharto's regime was highly centralized, opposing the principle of regional autonomy on
the grounds that it violated the unity of the Republic. The New Order sought to destroy
all organized political opposition. In the late 1960s, the Acehnese Ulama worked with

\textsuperscript{157} Clifford Geertz, \textit{Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia} (New Haven: Yale
Suharto to exterminate communism, an enemy of the religion and the Republic. But the New Order ranked political Islam just below communism in the hierarchy of political threats. When the communists were eliminated, Suharto dismantled political Islam, giving the Pancasila ideology a legal basis, banning several Muslim political parties and mass organizations, making discussion of an Islamic state illegal, and denying Aceh’s religious autonomy.

Suharto’s religious suppression was not the source of the current conflict. The New Order economy was controlled by Suharto and his cronies, built on resource extraction and megaprojects—“modernization theory made flesh.” In the early 1970s, thousands of Javanese were sent to Aceh as a part of Suharto’s transmigration policy and Aceh’s economy fell into the hands of Suharto’s inner circle. In 1974, an oil contract was granted to a partnership of state-led Pertamina and Mobil Oil in North Aceh. The Lhokseumawe oil contract was typical of New Order economics, with the New Order and military growing wealthy at the expense of not only local communities, but local elites as well. One of the companies which lost the contract was Doral International, owned by an Acehnese aristocrat named Hasan di Tiro.

On 4 December 1976, di Tiro and approximately seventy foreign-educated Acehnese “comprising doctors, engineers, academics, and businessmen” created the Free

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158 During this purge, local trials would be held to decide whether suspected communists were Acehnese or not on the basis of whether they could recite prayer in Arabic. Siegel, Shadow and Sound, 272.


160 Pancasila is derived from Sanskrit and refers to the five principles of the Indonesian state, as proclaimed by Sukarno in June 1945. The first principle, ‘the belief in one god’, is likely the most controversial, a balance between secularism and a religious state. Under Suharto, Pancasila became a vague but pervasive law, allowing Suharto to crush enemies by charging them with violating its principles.

Aceh Movement (GAM). The GAM did not find support among the population and was routed, its leaders fleeing to Malaysia, Libya, and Sweden. The next decade witnessed a growth in the military’s control of Acehnese resources, expanding from oil to sectors such as logging, industry, and property. In 1989, the GAM returned to Aceh and attacked military outposts, but again they were not successful. But this time, the GAM found some support among the public and held out longer as a result of training in Libya. The Indonesian military responded by declaring Aceh a military operations area (DOM), using ‘Shock Therapy’ to scare the Acehnese from supporting separatism. The next eleven years witnessed growing corruption alongside gross violations of human rights, sowing the seeds for support for the GAM and a full-scale conflict.

In 1998, the Asian Economic Crisis and the fall of Suharto created a critical juncture and an opportunity for the GAM, which now enjoyed tremendous popularity. An increasingly organized GAM attacked a weakened TNI, with full-scale fighting erupting by 1999. This era marked the beginning of ethnic violence against Javanese transmigrants, as well as further human rights abuses by the TNI. Another important change was the rise of Acehnese civil society, comprising student organizations, women’s groups, human rights groups, and environmentalists. For instance, SIRA (Aceh Referendum Information Center) was able to organize the largest rally in Acehnese history, when thousands flooded the streets of Banda Aceh to demand a referendum in


163 As stated by President Suharto, “some of the corpses were left [in public places] just like that. This was for the purpose of shock therapy... so that the general public would understand that there was still someone capable of taking action.” Cited in Amnesty International, “Shock Therapy: Restoring Order in Aceh, 1989-1993” (August 1993), and Arnaud Dubus et Nicholas Revise, Armée du Peuple, Armée du Roi: Les Militaires Face à la Société en Indonésie et en Thaïlande (Bangkok: IRASEC, 2002), 87.

164 Please see Shane Joshua Barter, Neither Wolf, nor Lamb: Embracing Civil Society in the Aceh Conflict (Bangkok: Forum-Asia, 2004).
2000. Acehnese civil society quickly became important actors in Aceh, offering a non-violent alternative and maintaining ties to Acehnese communities.

However, the role of civil society has been ignored in peace dialogues, which have been limited to GAM and Indonesian representatives. The first peace dialogues were organized by the Henry Dunant Centre (HDC) in 1999, leading to the Humanitarian Pause in 2001. When the Pause collapsed, a group of ‘Wise Men’, including Surin Pitsuwan and Anthony Zinni, kept the dialogue alive, leading to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in 2002. This was a more substantial document, creating a brief peace, a number of demilitarized zones, and involving the Thai and Filipino military observers. But as the COHA continued, violence returned, leading Indonesia to cancel talks and arrest GAM negotiators in May 2003. The TNI launched a massive assault and declared Martial Law for the next two years. The Civil Emergency in Aceh effectively ended with the 26 December 2004 Tsunami, an event which resulted in the loss of 250,000 lives, the proliferation of foreign organizations, an expansion of TNI activities, and a public weary of continued conflict. The Civil Emergency was officially lifted in May 2005, although North and West Aceh remained under military control.

A model of the origins and the perpetuation of the conflict can be set out as follows. The conflict began as a result of the economic grievances of Acehnese elites. Although centralized economic exploitation dissatisfied many Acehnese, the majority of the population was not directly affected by the oil industry. The conflict expanded due

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166 Further, oil is no longer an important issue in the conflict despite being the principal cause. First, NAD Law has given the Province 80% control over energy revenues as of 2002. Second, and not unrelated, the Acehnese oil supply is nearly drained, with corporations such as EXXON-Mobil unlikely to renew their contracts. The liquid natural gas plants operated by PT Arun will also close, including two in 2005 and another one scheduled for 2007. According to the American Embassy, 90% of Aceh’s LNG
to military abuse of human rights and widespread corruption. Military abuse created a mobilized public that was anti-Indonesia, allowing for ‘negative’ GAM popularity, where support is a product of opposing the TNI, not their vision of the future. Popular resistance in turn justified TNI fears and led to military reinforcements, Martial Law, and further abuse. The result is a feedback process that is independent of the original cause, what Bertrand refers to as “the cycle of protest and repressive response.”

167 Bertrand, Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia, 171.

**Economic Exploitation → Military Abuse ← Popular Resistance**

The 2005 Helsinki Peace Talks have witnessed an altered GAM position, accepting a form of Indonesian rule over Aceh. The talks stalled in July 2005 over the legality of a regional GAM political party, but eventually led to a new agreement in August 2005. These talks are likely more of a strategy for both sides to gain international support after the tsunami than a sincere desire for peace. The Aceh conflict is far from over. Peace will be dictated on the ground, depending on how the Indonesian Government responds to a legacy of abuse.

*The Free Aceh Movement*

This subsection takes a closer look at the leadership and strategies of the Free Aceh Movement. GAM units are divided into seventeen regions, although from 2005, active fighting has been limited to West Aceh and North Aceh. During the peak of the fighting, the GAM was organized into Cantoi intelligence units and had a special women’s division, *Inong Balee*, although such divisions have become less important since the collapse of peace talks in 2004, when the GAM went underground. At this time, fields have already been depleted. Embassy of the United States of America, “Indonesia: Troubles in Indonesia’s LNG Industry” (March 2005). Fitri Wulandari, “Government Reviewing Arun LNG Shipment to Secure Domestic Gas Supply,” *Jakarta Post* (12 November 2003).
the GAM had an estimated 3,000 fighters, of whom about 1,000 have been killed during
Martial Law. It is difficult to gauge the number of GAM members who sincerely
support the GAM, solely oppose Indonesia, or are criminal elements in search of
weapons. Following Clausewitz, I divide the GAM into its leadership in exile, its leaders
and members in the field, and the public.

By GAM leadership, I refer to the hundred or so leaders based in Sweden,
Denmark, Finland, Malaysia, and Singapore. Unlike other separatist movements in
Southeast Asia, GAM leaders are wealthy, foreign-educated business leaders who have
spent only a handful of years in their homeland. The conflict began when Hasan di
Tiro’s company was left out of the Lhokseumawe oil contract. The GAM leader holds
law degrees from Columbia and Fordham Universities and owns an array of businesses.
According to the GAM, di Tiro:

...is a well-known international businessman, a revolutionary, a world traveller
who feels at home in the West as much as in the East. As a successful
businessman he presided over Doral International Ltd New York, a company
active in the fields of investment banking, petroleum, natural gas, agriculture,
husbandry, shipping and aviation.

This statement demonstrates not only the background of the GAM leader, but also his
Western focus. Another example is the method in which di Tiro writes his nationalist
texts. The rebel leader insists on listening to classical music, setting historical events in
Acehnese history to classical music, including the GAM’s Declaration of Independence
in 1976 set to Vivaldi. The GAM leader’s Western background is unique among
Southeast Asian separatist conflicts.

Although the GAM leadership is tightly-knit, bound by several familiar relations, it is not monolithic.\(^{171}\) The dominant faction, ANSLF-GAM, is located in Sweden and led by di Tiro and Malik Mahmood. Their most serious rival was the Malaysian-based MP- (Majelis Pemerintahan, Government Council) GAM, led by Dr. Husaini Hasan, Yusuf Daud, and Teuku Don Fadli, which sees itself as “more Islamic.”\(^{172}\) The division occurred in 1995, when the MP-GAM advocated an Islamic Republic, while the ANSLF-GAM demanded reestablishing a traditional Sultanate.\(^{173}\) The aging Hasan di Tiro and his group supported a Sultanate and wanted his son Karim Hasan to succeed him, whereas MP-GAM demanded some form of election. MP-GAM aspired to modernist Islam, while the ANSLF-GAM promoted a traditional Acehnese political system.

This divide essentially ended in 1999. First, the ANSLF-GAM’s existing economic advantage was magnified by its foreign currency reserves during the Asian economic crisis. Second, di Tiro’s relationship with Western governments allowed the ANSLF to become the sole representative of Aceh in the peace talks. This advantage benefited the ANSLF-GAM, “strengthening its position vis-à-vis other GAM factions and pushing it to unite.”\(^{174}\) After the talks were announced, the ANSLF assassinated the leaders of MP-GAM in Malaysia, becoming the dominant movement. The MP-GAM accused ANSLF-GAM ‘Prime Minister’ Malik Mahmood of ordering the killing, as there had been a long history of tension between Fadli and Mahmood. This aspect of GAM politics demonstrates a turn away from legalism and towards more criminal elements.

\(^{171}\) Di Tiro’s cousin Dr. Zaini Abdullah is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was Minister of Health, and is also the GAM’s chief negotiator. Di Tiro’s nephew and Zaini Abdullah’s son is GAM spokesperson Bakhtiar Abdullah. Di Tiro’s son, Karim Hasan, is expected to become ‘Sultan’ when his father retires.
\(^{172}\) Schulze, The Free Aceh Movement, 22. Please see the MP-GAM Website for more information, http://hem.passagen.se/freeaceh/.
The ANSLF / MP split was limited to its leadership; the effects were not felt in the field. The GAM leadership is distant from the villages of Aceh in terms of geography and class, creating a large division between GAM leaders and fighters. Most GAM field members believe in the GAM’s ethnic nationalism and separatist platform, however are also more religious and closer to the Acehnese public. GAM leaders lack control over field operations, as many GAM members are former TNI or common criminals using GAM networks for profit.\(^ {175} \) This detachment also hints that a peace deal brokered by GAM leaders without consulting the village level may not be enforceable. Finally, the Acehnese public must also be considered. Their support for the GAM depends mainly on the actions of the TNI. In 1998, a legacy of human rights abuses created tremendous support for the rebels. Since this time, GAM abuse and a changing Indonesia has reduced support for the GAM, which as of 2005 has only casual support.

Goals & Strategies

A unified, educated, and well-funded GAM leadership has been able develop a sophisticated strategy in both foreign and domestic realms. First, the GAM’s foreign strategies have taken several forms. Kirsten Schulze notes that “for the first fifteen years, GAM’s ideology contained an anticapitalist and anti-imperialist element.”\(^ {176} \) Its Declaration of Independence framed the “Javanese neo-colonialists” as exploiting Aceh’s resources “under the guise of ‘development.’”\(^ {177} \) As with the PULO and MNLF, socialism was the language of resistance, the dominant way to express any form of rebellion. This said, the GAM’s use of socialist language was more problematic due to

\(^ {175} \) Edward Aspinall, “Anti-Insurgency Logic in Aceh: Military Policy of Separating Civilians from Guerillas Generates More Resistance,” Inside Indonesia, Issue 76 (Fall 2003), 24.
\(^ {176} \) Schulze, The Free Aceh Movement, 8.
\(^ {177} \) Free Aceh Movement, Declaration of Independence of Aceh-Sumatra (1976).
its economic interests, the absence of communist allies in Aceh, and an anti-communist Acehnese population. Socialist influences disappeared in the 1980s.

The GAM achieved greater success by changing from socialist anti-colonialism to legalistic claims to self-determination. The GAM asserts that Aceh was wrongly incorporated into Indonesia; the Dutch “illegally transferred ‘sovereignty’ they did not possess over Aceh-Sumatra to...the Javanese—now calling themselves Indonesians.”

GAM publications frequently cite the United Nations ‘Right to Self-Determination’, demanding the international community liberate Aceh by force or at least support independence. This strategy was modified somewhat in the 1990s, when the rebels learned from East Timor and local civil society to embrace the language of human rights, which it frames as further grounds for legal self-determination.

GAM foreign strategy is geared solely to Western audiences. Educated and residing in Western countries, GAM leaders depend on Western business and political allies. The GAM secured a dominant position in peace talks by appealing to Western organizations. The GAM’s relationship with the West can also be seen in its immediate condemnation of the September 11 attacks, its support for the Iraq and Afghan Wars, and its positive response to the American military after the tsunami. The GAM has always sought a strong relationship with the USA, believing this is its best chance for

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179 Talal Asad differentiates religious human rights focuses on compassion and pushing those responsible to repent. A second approach is legalist, demanding justice and punishment. Like the GAM, the legalist approach to human rights “doesn’t make a moral appeal—at any rate, not to those who are declared to be the violators of rights—it declares a state of war.” Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 142.
separatism. The GAM’s foreign strategy looks west, setting it apart from other regional separatist organizations, which look to the Ummah.

The GAM takes an intriguing approach to its domestic strategy, a clear case of Anderson’s ‘Official Nationalism’, where leaders construct identities to fulfill the requirements of the nation-state. The GAM has gone to great lengths to construct ethnic nationalism in Aceh, despite (and due to) the fact that only 40% of the population speaks Acehnese. The GAM has not created Acehnese ethnic nationalism though, it predates the current conflict. It has instead exaggerated and refined existing sentiments.

The GAM’s official nationalism is evident in terms of history, language, symbolism, and more. First, the GAM focuses on Aceh’s history as an independent state, attempting to “justify their claims to self-determination by constructing ethno-histories of glorious independent statehood stretching back to antiquity.” For example, di Tiro asserts that “Acheh, on the island of Sumatra, was an internationally recognized independent state for thousands of years,” and that Aceh is “one of the oldest independent states in the world.”

History has become a battle front; Indonesia claims the Aceh-Dutch War was anti-European, proto-Indonesian nationalism, while the GAM frames it as Acehnese nationalism, and each downplay the importance of Islam.

Language is another component of GAM strategy. The Acehnese language is different from Bahasa Indonesia; they share linguistic structures, but differ greatly by

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180 This approach was quite clear during the HDC peace dialogues, which GAM joined primarily as a strategy to internationalize the conflict. The GAM focused on Anthony Zinni, who they believed had the ear of the President and whom they frequently stated was in support of Acehnese independence. Please see Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement*, 52.


183 Hasan di Tiro, “Denominated Indonesians,” (20 January 1995). Available online at www.asnlf.net/asnlf_int/frame_ges_int/frame_int.htm. Di Tiro also claims that because of Aceh’s relations with Britain, when it becomes independent, Aceh should become part of the Commonwealth.

Acehnese is closely related to Malay dialects and has strong Islamic influences. In fact, all early Acehnese texts were written in either Malay or Arabic. The GAM focuses on Malay influences, dubbing its language Bahasa Melayu, and ignores Arabic terms at the expense of greater differentiation from Indonesia. For instance, most Acehnese use the Arabic term for history, 'tawaikh', however the GAM prefers the Indo-Malay term, 'serajah'. GAM linguistic changes also include Western terms and symbols, its Acehnese publications dotted with the Swedish 'e' or terms such as 'statement' or 'good' instead of 'pernyataan' or 'bagus.'

The GAM also constructs political symbols, more so than other regional separatist organizations. Its website features a map where Aceh is at the extreme right and the Indian Ocean takes up most of the image, eliminating most of Indonesia from the picture. The GAM Coat of Arms is another case. It contains Turkish influences, such as the widely used crescent moon, but also has two Acehnese swords, or Rincong, handled by a lion and a pegasus in the British tradition. The Acehnese flag provides another example of GAM symbolism. It was originally adapted from the Turks during Aceh's fight against the Dutch. The GAM claims its flag is 2000-3000 years old, foregoing its religious heritage by attempting to date Aceh's civilization prior to Islam. Finally, the GAM demands the recreation of the Sultanate. The GAM's website features a list of Sultans, promoting di Tiro's family to de facto Sultans after the Dutch surrender in order to establish his legitimacy. In so doing, di Tiro has "totally misrepresented [his
ancestor’s] role as something like the earlier sultans in order to give himself the absurd claim to embody Aceh’s monarchy."¹⁹⁰ This construction has been largely successful; in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, the reporter dubbed the rebel leader “his royal highness.”¹⁹¹ The GAM downplays most Muslim symbols, but focuses a great deal on the role of the Sultan, which is portrayed as a political symbol, devoid of religious authority. This resonates with Acehnese history, where the Sultan was not a religious figure, but instead represented traditional power, forming a three-way system with the Ulama and Uleebalang. As noted by Hadi, although the religious term of Sultan is used, “the traditional Malay political concept survived.”¹⁹²

A full analysis of GAM social constructions demands a separate study, giving proper place to Acehnese dances, music, food, Ramadan parades, holidays, calendar, burial rites, city names, weaving, art, sculpture, and traditional weapons.¹⁹³ Another aspect of this study could compare the GAM’s official nationalism with Indonesia’s. For now, I conclude that the GAM’s foreign and domestic strategies—its alliances, discourse, historiography, and cultural constructions—are vivid representations of its worldviews. The GAM’s treatment of culture and history shows a preference for Acehnese, then Western, and then Malay traditions, while avoiding Indonesian and Muslim influences. These cultural preferences illustrate the GAM’s political preferences.

¹⁹² Amirul Hadi, Islam and State in Sumatra, 236.
¹⁹³ For instance, the Rincong, an Acehnese sword, is laden with Islamic symbolism. Rincong handles have a peculiar shape which is meant to approximate the Arabic script for Bismillah, however the GAM’s webpage explains the shape as an innovation from war. Please see Smith, Aceh: Art and Culture.
An Ethnic Conflict

The GAM did not create Acehnese ethnic nationalism. As far back as the 1930s, the Dutch Governor noted that Acehnese identity is "reinforced by a powerful sense of race, with a consequent contempt for foreigners and hatred for the infidel intruder." This statement was made by a Dutch official during an ongoing war, but it does illustrate an aspect of Acehnese culture, a result of centuries of independence and warfare. Since this time, Acehnese nationalism has been strong, a mixture of Islamic and ethnic identity.

The GAM has directed this prior sense of Acehnese nationalism, ignoring religion and mobilizing ethnicity. Di Tiro sees the struggle as an "instinct of survival of the herd, the group, the race, the nation, and the state." Some commentators go so far as to assert that "GAM guerrillas are motivated by parochial ethnic hatred. For them the war is about killing Javanese." For years, the GAM has blamed Aceh's problems on Javanese scapegoats. Javanese transmigrants arrived in the early 1970s, mostly farmers, and coexisted with the Acehnese for decades. However, the GAM associated these groups with temporary industrial workers and the TNI. In 2000, GAM Deputy Commander Sofyan Daud issued a warning that "non-Acehnese residents, we ask you to leave the country of our forebears as soon as possible." The ensuing attacks killed hundreds of Javanese and created waves of Javanese internally displaced persons in North Sumatra. Remaining Javanese in South Aceh have organized militias such as Puja Kusuma and BERANTAS (the Aceh Separatists Resistance Front), clashing with Acehnese villagers and justifying GAM suspicion. At this point, many Acehnese have a

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196 Kirsten E. Schulze, "The Other Side to Aceh's Rebels," Asia Times (22 July 2003).
deep dislike for the Javanese and other Indonesian ethnic groups, as opposed to just the military or the government. The aim of the GAM is to create an Acehnese identity which is “incompatible with an overarching Indonesian one.” This has been largely successfully, as many Acehnese accept this ethnic nationalism and the conflict has developed into an ethnic one.

The Role of Religion

Most descriptions of Aceh begin with Acehnese orthodoxy, where Aceh equals Islam (Aceh identik dengan Islam). The GAM has gone to great lengths to ignore religious elements of Acehnese identity. Although he argues that the GAM actively attempts to “secularize the history of Acehnese resistance”, Edward Aspinall believes that “it is probably going too far to suggest that GAM is a ‘secular’ organization.”

Individual GAM troops are generally religious and are likely motivated as much by religion as nationalism, however their goal is an independent state under secular GAM leadership. The GAM leadership in exile and the organization are consistently secular. For Talal Asad, there are reasoned and practised secularisms. The GAM leadership holds the former, deeper view, and many GAM recruits hold the latter, strategic view.

In GAM statements, “attention is focused on Aceh’s national wealth. Islamic appeals are noticeable by their absence.” Many NGOs agree, “GAM considers itself as a nationalist independence movement which does not pursue any religious aims.” The GAM even asserts its secularism: “to interject religious issues, especially when in fact

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199 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
200 Asad, Formations of the Secular, 62.
there are none, to a legitimate independence struggle is to undermine it...the question of ‘Islamic State’ has never been raised by freedom of Aceh. It was raised, ironically, solely by the Indonesian military regime in Jakarta.”203 The reasoning of this statement is suspect, but also illuminating. The GAM’s secularism sets it apart from other regional separatists despite Aceh being more Islamic than regions such as Pattani or Mindanao.

The relationship between the GAM and religion is illustrated in two examples. First is the role of Islamic GAM splinter groups. I have already discussed the more religious MP-GAM, but there was also a short-lived splinter known as the Front Mujahidin Islam Aceh (FMIA). Created by GAM dissident Fauzi Hasbi in 2002, the FMIA accused the GAM as being corrupt and un-Islamic, referring to the Darul Islam Rebellion and Suharto’s treatment of religion as the foundation of Islamic separatism. Many Acehnese grievances were easily adapted to a religious lens by the FMIA, namely TNI human rights abuses. The FMIA was eliminated by the GAM within months of its formation, with many of its surviving members forming the Republic Islam Aceh (RIA), a term used during the Darul Islam Rebellion. According to Arskal Salim, “while condemning Hasan di Tiro as more secular and hence unacceptable to the Acehnese, RIA has tried to emphasize the Islamic identity of their own movement and demands the right to self-determination to fully implement Islamic law.”204 In 2002, the RIA was eliminated by GAM intelligence units (Cantoi).205 These examples demonstrate that some elements of the GAM in the field maintain religious views of the conflict, but also that they can be suppressed by secular GAM leaders.

204 Arskal Salim, “Sharia from Below in Aceh” Indonesia and the Malay World, 93.
205 Schulze, The Free Aceh Movement, 22.
A second example is the GAM’s reaction to Indonesia’s attempts to Islamicize the conflict and isolate the pro-Western GAM. The special autonomy package promised to GAM includes much of what Aceh was promised after the Darul Islam Rebellion, including religious autonomy and Sharia law. The GAM has labeled this a distraction from the real issue of political independence, stating that “the country will have a modern legal system, not one based on Sharia” [emphasis added]. Many commentators agree that the Indonesian Government “has attempted to sow the seeds of internal conflict between the Acehnese themselves through the offer or Sharia.” The TNI has criticized the GAM for lacking religion: “GAM embraces secularism, it cares nothing for religion...[its] spiritual barrenness is a result of GAM being untouched by faith.” In an attempt to add religious dimensions to the conflict, the TNI facilitated the arrival of Islamic militias from Maluku after the tsunami. The GAM has a history with groups such as Laskar Jihad, which openly criticized GAM secularism and Western support in 2002. The GAM responded by ‘banning’ the groups from Aceh, because the Movement “strongly opposes Laskar Jihad’s attempts to radicalize the Islamic Ummah in Aceh.”

In response to the 2005 deployment of Mujahadin Indonesia (MMI) and Front Pembela Islam (FPI) to Aceh, the GAM stated that it deplores the arrival of “thugs and terrorists”, whose views “contradict the tolerance and faith of Acehnese Muslims.” NGOs such as SIRA agree with the GAM that Islamic militias threaten to “steer the conflict in Aceh into a religious one.”

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206 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
207 Arskal Salim, “Sharia from Below in Aceh” Indonesia and the Malay World, 93.
208 Cited in Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
209 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
The secularism of the GAM does not mean that the conflict lacks religious actors. Religious organizations are important in the Aceh conflict, although most are local, not national. Indonesian religious organizations have a troubled history in Aceh. When Muhammadiyah first came to Aceh, it was immediately rejected as a foreign Muslim group. In fact, the PUSA was organized in 1939 in opposition to Muhammadiyah, which only began to grow in Aceh in the 1980s but still lacks a support outside of Banda Aceh. This division is largely due to the linkages between Muhammadiyah and the Uleebalang, which worked together against the Ulama in the 1940s. National Muslim student organizations also had a difficult time in Aceh, such as Taman Siswa in the 1930s. Nahdatul Ulama (NU) has almost no base in Aceh due to its Javanese roots. The NU even worked against the Darul Islam Rebellion in the 1950s, when it organized an Ulama conference to denounce the movement as un-Islamic. Early political parties such as Masyumi were initially strong in Aceh, however their pro-Indonesian stance in the Darul Islam Rebellion led PUSA leaders to realize “that their link with the national leaders through MASYUMI might be at the expense of their local interests.”

After the fall of Masyumi, the PPP was popular for a brief period, but fell out of favour in the 1980s. Although far from free or fair, the 2004 Elections in Aceh saw the defeat of Muslim parties such as the PPP and PAN and a victory for the Democrats. The rise of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Aceh demonstrates some support for an Indonesian Muslim organization, however it is too early to tell whether the party will continue to grow, and if it does, whether this is due to its policies on religion or on clean government. Although religious organizations provide some linkages to Indonesia, Acehnese religious organizations, from the PUSA to the HUDA, are primarily indigenous.

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212 Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, the Republican Revolt, 56.
Local religious organizations have played an important role in trying to build peace. The Ulama, religious schools, and students are highly critical of Indonesian abuses, as are all Acehnese, but they are also critical of the GAM. The HUDA (Congregation of Acehnese Ulama) has opposed the conflict for years, condemning human rights violations as "forbidden to Muslims." Muslim student groups such as the SMIPA (the Concerned Islamic Students Solidarity for Aceh) have organized anti-war demonstrations on a number of occasions. Muslim students, together with the Ulama and several NGOs, created a massive campaign to pressure both sides to agree to a ceasefire during Ramadan in 2003. Several Muslim academics have been active in community peace talks. Dayan Dawood was the Dean of Syiah Kuala University. In September 2001, he proposed community-level talks between the TNI and the GAM and was found brutally slain a week later. Other Muslim scholars who tried to broker peace deals and were assassinated include Hasbi Abdullah, Ahmad Dewi, and Safwan Idris.

As noted in Chapter 3, populations tend to become religious during times of crisis, especially Muslim communities in response to uncertainty or threat. My three disciplined configurative case studies illustrate this process, where conflicts created increasingly religious populations. In southern Thailand and the Philippines, secular groups fell out of favour with an increasingly religious public which also rejected radical Islamic groups that strayed from the separatist agenda. In historical Aceh, religious purification led to the rise of the Ulama, culminating in the Darul Islam Rebellion, where Aceh played an important role in the call for an Islamic state, settling with the guarantee that Aceh regain political and religious autonomy. Suharto failed to respect this agreement and sought to

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eliminate political Islam in Aceh. All of these factors make the current conflict a most-likely case for Islamic separatism.

The current separatist conflict is a result of material grievances, expanding only after years of military abuse into a major conflict. The GAM is an organized, secular rebel group that has managed to monopolize discourse in the conflict. It has nurtured ethnic nationalism while downplaying religion. A powerful civil society also frames grievances in secular terms, while religious leaders play a neutral role. Religion is not absent in Aceh—religious factions of the GAM have arisen, Indonesia has attempted to add religious elements, and religious organizations have played a peacekeeping role where possible. Religion is alive and well, yet despite years of conflict, it is limited to the private sphere. Groups have not reached out to foreign Muslim organizations or states for support, human rights have not been framed in religious terms, neither the TNI nor the GAM have taken to outwardly religious social practices or statements, and powerful religious leaders remain uninvolved in the political realm.

Many writers focus on Aceh’s Islamic identity and possible religious grievances, but are silent on why these have not translated into a religious conflict. Bertrand argues that the Darul Islam Rebellion ended when the Acehnese “retreated in a regionalist defense of Islam and local culture.” Initial dissatisfaction came after Sharia law was not implemented, with economic exploitation and human rights abuses enabling this sentiment to grow into conflict. In the end, “the objectives of creating an Islamic state had long given way to disillusion and, now, disgust with the treatment of the
Acehnese. But where did Islam go? Why would the hope of an Islamic state 'give way' after years of exploitation and human rights abuses instead of growing?

Many accounts of the conflict portray the Darul Islam Rebellion and Aceh’s Islamic culture as important factors in the current conflict. These same sources agree that the conflict is secular. Ignored is the gap between religious grievance and material demand. Theory, history, and comparison predict that the current Aceh conflict should display religious traits. But the dominant rebel group is secular, religious groups are neutral, and it is the Indonesian government that is trying to add religious elements. This leaves some important questions unanswered: What accounts for secularism in the Aceh conflict and how does this speak to broader theory?

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214 Bertrand, Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia, 173.
Chapter 5   Assessment

What accounts for secularism in the Aceh conflict? The sources of secularism are without doubt a mixture of a number of factors. My aim is to assess each of my hypotheses in terms of their explanatory power and their interaction.

**Hypothesis A:** *A separatist conflict will remain secular if there are no religious grievances.*

If the grievances of a conflict are not religious, but rather due to political, historical, or economic factors, religion will not be politically salient and is less likely to become a focal point for rebellion. For instance, if a government attempts to convert minorities to the religion of the majority, a response will likely be framed as a religious struggle because the grievance is explicitly religious. Some state actions against minorities are overtly religious and are therefore likely to produce a religious response; conversely, one may expect that if events or actions that spark a separatist rebellion are not religious in nature, there is no reason for religion to be mobilized.

This hypothesis lacks strong explanatory power for Acehnese secularism and appears to be a foregone conclusion. First, this hypothesis hints of path dependency, where the origins of the conflict lock-in certain characteristics throughout its duration, ignoring grievances generated within the conflict as it draws out. Frequently, peace talks imply this logic by listing the causes of the conflict and attempting to negate each of them in search of a solution. In Aceh, talks have focused on the original causes of the conflict (oil revenue and political autonomy) instead of focusing on what expanded or perpetuates it (human rights and the military economy). The forces that create a phenomenon are frequently different than those which sustain it. This is the underlying message of Paul Pierson’s work on welfare state retrenchment. Pierson asserts that what sustains a
phenomenon can be radically different than what creates it because new stakeholders and political environments will form around it.\textsuperscript{215} In the case of Aceh, resource extraction, namely oil, was responsible for mobilizing elites to form a rebel movement. As described in Chapter 4, the grievance that initiated the conflict, oil, is no longer important, but fighting continues. This demonstrates that new grievances have arisen during the conflict, in this case military abuses. In name, the current Aceh conflict is the same as the one in 1976, however today it has entirely different dimensions, stakeholders, and intensity. If a conflict's origins are based on secular grievances, it does not hold that new, more religious grievances will not form as it endures.

Second, a 'religious' grievance depends on how the public perceives it. Perception is almost as important as reality; in fact the two often become difficult to separate. In a secular conflict, groups are less likely to interpret actions as being religious, therefore religious grievances are rarely found. Conversely, a religious conflict will involve religious interpretations of grievances which may not have been intended as religious acts. This is partly a tautology, where grievances are more likely to be viewed as religious if the conflict is already religious, but for a conflict to be religious, it must have religious grievances. Although some grievances may be blatantly religious, such as attacks on religious institutions, most grievances rely on perception to become religious.

Perception is central to ethnicity theories. As Horowitz observes, "it is not the attribute that makes the group, but the group and group differences that make the attribute important."\textsuperscript{216} Theories from both above and from below reserve an important role for perception in deciding the role of identity in conflict. Instrumentalism and

\textsuperscript{216} Donald L. Horowitz, \textit{Ethnic Groups in Conflict} (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 1985), 50.
constructivism suggest that elites can influence perception by picking and choosing among cultural traits, myths, and historical events. If they frame an event as religious, for instance by portraying a human rights abuse as an attack fuelled by faith, a grievance which is not directly related to religion may become so. For example, the New PULO drew the Thai Military into firefights within historic mosques in 2004, turning Thai military attacks into anti-Muslim acts which stimulated both local and global reactions. Leaders have an important role in shaping the way grievances are perceived by the public.

Theories from below also explain how grievances are subject to interpretation. Primordial and psychological approaches show how groups may focus on certain traits as a defense mechanism in response to uncertainty or threat. An invasion may be carried out for purely material reasons, but a community may purify its faith to differentiate itself, unify, or cope, making a trait which is unrelated to the original act become important. During the Dutch War, the Netherlands invaded Aceh for economic and strategic reasons, but the public interpreted Dutch aggression as an attack on their faith, making Dutch ambition into a Holy War. From here, this perception became a reality, as the Dutch targeted mosques as sources of rebel activity, further accelerating religious interpretation of the war among the Acehnese and reifying the idea of Holy War.

The grievances responsible for the current Aceh conflict could also be interpreted as religious, but instead they have been viewed in secular terms. One source of potential religious grievance was the New Order's religious policies, namely Suharto's denial of religious autonomy for Aceh and the suppression of Islamic organizations. A second potential source is Indonesian attempts to add religious dimensions to the current conflict by allowing the implementation of Sharia law, criticizing the GAM's religious credentials,
and allowing Islamic militias access to Aceh. The Acehnese could consider Indonesia’s attempts to mobilize religion as an affront to their faith, but thus far there has been only a minor reaction from religious leaders. Because grievances in the Aceh conflict have not been viewed as religious, one must look to forces which influence perception.

Although confirmed in the sense that grievances which are perceived as secular will usually lead to a secular conflict, Hypothesis A does not hold much explanatory power for why grievances are perceived in any particular way. Although some grievances are more likely than others to be seen as religious, perception is almost as important as grievances themselves. The Acehnese have several potential religious grievances against Indonesia that have been perceived through a secular lens. There must be a prior cause which explains why grievances are not perceived as religious in Aceh. My search for the sources of secularism in Aceh is also a quest to understand what causes the Acehnese to interpret grievances through a secular lens; this could be a product of holding the same faith as Indonesia or it could be a product of GAM instrumentalism.

**Hypothesis B:** A common faith between state and separatists will mitigate the chances of religious conflict.

If a separatist region shares the religion of the state, faith is less likely to be perceived by the public as a divisive issue or mobilized by leaders. If this thesis is true, one would expect that most religious separatist conflicts involve different religions and secular conflicts to involve common ones. After describing the relationship between common faith and religious conflict across a number of cases, I will look at why sharing the religion of the host state might result in faith becoming less salient in separatist conflicts before assessing this approach for Aceh.
In his ongoing study of the role of identity in Acehnese separatism, Edward Aspinall, the most prominent foreign scholar of the Aceh conflict, argues that a common faith not only unites Aceh and Indonesia, but it has also obscured a sense of Acehnese nationalism. Qualities of Islam such as the Ummah, which serve to strengthen secessionist claims among Muslim minorities, "are particularly amenable to be used against separatism where both the separatist minority and the integrationist majority are Muslim." Here, notions of unity and brotherhood, as well as networks and moral understanding, have helped create a secular conflict. For Aspinall, the shared religion hypothesis has great merit in explaining secular insurgencies.

Other cases of separatist conflict support this hypothesis. Aspinall notes that the most examples of secular separatism involve a shared religion, for example in the Bengali secession, the Western Sahara, the Kurdish region, and the Basque region. In contrast, religious separatism usually occurs when different faiths are held by state and separatist, as in southern Thailand, the southern Philippines, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Cyprus, Eritrea, Xinjiang, the Karen and Rohingya in Burma, southern Sudan, and Chechnya. A survey of other cases supports the hypothesis that the role religion plays is largely determined by whether or not the separatist region and the state share a common faith.

However, unlike the secular cases above, Aceh is a case where the separatist region is known for its religious orthodoxy, contrasted with the acculturated, eclectic faith of the centre. Here, the Darul Islam Rebellion is extremely important in

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217 Edward Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh,” presented at Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia, organized by the East-West Center (June 16-17 2003).

highlighting the divide between the religious identities of Aceh and Indonesia and qualifying the shared religion hypothesis. There are some important differences between these cases, namely that the Darul Islam Rebellion was not a separatist conflict. The Darul Islam Rebellion does not demonstrate how separatist groups mobilize ethnic identity, but it does demonstrate quite clearly that Aceh and the Indonesian Government hold some different views of what constitutes the Islamic religion. This perception continues today, to the point that some Acehnese do not consider the Javanese to be Muslim at all, while others simply see them as misguided. According to Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, the Rebellion was fought against:

A non-Muslim government in Jakarta...as if the Acehnese had organized another holy war against the non-believers. While attacking military concentrations in the towns, the soldiers of the Darul Islam referred to the national army, TNI, as the non-believers' army and chanted the religious cry, 'God is the Greatest.'

This example calls into question the assumption that Islam is perceived as a binding force between Aceh and Indonesia. At this point, I consider the evidence concerning Hypothesis B, where it is suggested that grievances, differentiation, empathy, and institutional linkages will mitigate religious conflict cases where religion is common.

**Grievances**

Here, Hypothesis A (secular grievances) fits in with Hypothesis B (common religion). Grievances are less likely to be intended or perceived as religious slights if state and periphery have a common faith. My case studies demonstrate that many separatist conflicts form in reaction to nation-building, where the image of the majority is framed as a national model. Where there are religious differences, nation-building can be

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construed as proselytizing. In southern Thailand, the introduction of a Buddhist curriculum, the elimination of Islamic schools, state support for Buddhism, limitations on Islamic rituals such as the Haj, and several other aspects of Thai nation-building, resulted in religious rebellions. If a minority population holds the same religion as the majority, nation-building does not include the marginalization of local faiths, making state expansion less threatening to religion and limiting it as a source of grievance.

Although this claim is convincing, Aceh offers a modification. Official nationalism under the New Order was clearlypressive to Islamic orthodoxy. In Aceh, Suharto dismantled political Islam, demanded Pancasila to be emphasized in school curriculum in place of Islam, sponsored transmigration from Java, and placed Acehnese administration in the hands of Javanese officials. Thus, some of the religious grievances resulting from official nationalism elsewhere can be found under the New Order despite what is nominally a shared faith. I do not doubt that religious differences can cause nation-building to be perceived as religious intrusion, but it does not necessarily hold that sharing a common faith leads to nation-building being viewed as a secular endeavour. The important thing is perception; if a centralized state is perceived to be threatening local religion, grievance may still be coloured by faith despite a shared religion.

**Differentiation**

One of the most important factors in the same religion explanation is that if religion is shared, it loses its ability to act as a tool to differentiate one group from another. I have already described how religion was an important method, both from above and below, for the Acehnese to differentiate themselves from the Dutch. It is likely that Aceh would not have organized around religion if the invading army had been,
say, Arab. Religion was an obvious focal point for the public, for leaders, and for outside observers during the Dutch invasion because it was a clear divider between combatants. If a besieged population can differentiate itself from the enemy through faith, religion is more likely to become politically salient.

Aceh provides a limited qualification. As described, the Acehnese do not perceive Indonesians as holding the same faith. Darul Islam leaders had no problem in using religion to differentiate the Acehnese from the Indonesian Government, and few Acehnese would have considered the New Order to be a Muslim government. This perception is not limited to the state; even Indonesia’s more orthodox regions are suspect due to differences in practice. Although Aceh found common cause with other regions under Darul Islam, its leaders still clashed with Javanese and other Ulama regarding the specifics of Islamic law. This extended to Muslim populations; as noted by Anthony Reid, even Muslims from West Sumatra were dismissed as non-believers “no matter how strictly they observed religious duties.”

Aceh can be differentiated from Indonesia by religion because Acehnese Islam is intertwined with ethnic identity. Acehnese customs are considered part of their faith, but more importantly, faith pervades Acehnese customs. This entanglement makes it easier for religion as a primordial characteristic to draw a line between the Acehnese and other Indonesian Muslims. Religion has been a method to differentiate Aceh from other Muslim communities for centuries, qualifying this aspect of the same religion hypothesis. What matters is if the public believes religion differentiates them from other groups, which is more likely if there is a difference in faith.

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Empathy

Another factor is that communities with a shared faith may be more likely to empathize with one another, lessening the possibility of a full-scale conflict.\textsuperscript{221} This is especially true for Islam due to the Ummah, where faith overwhelms other distinctions to form a community of believers. Aspinall argues that the Ummah is of central importance in binding Aceh to Indonesia and for the secular conflict because it ties the groups together. Islam has probably mitigated violence in the Aceh conflict. During the Darul Islam Rebellion, religious groups throughout Indonesia protested abuses in Aceh, forcing the government to modify its tactics.\textsuperscript{222} The same bond colours the current conflict, where religious groups are at the forefront of solidarity with the Acehnese. This was the approach of Gus Dur, who believed that religion could bridge the differences between Aceh and Indonesia, and it is also evident in protests organized by IAIN campuses across the country in solidarity with human rights campaigns at its Aceh campus, al-Raniry. Muslim student organizations such as HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) have been active in publicizing human rights abuses in Aceh and offering prayers for its future.\textsuperscript{223} Against this hypothesis, the intensity of violence in Aceh between the TNI and GAM soldiers has not been lessened by common faith, with the exception of religious ceasefires. Also, many of these same Muslim groups that support Aceh also supported Christians in East Timor. Religious solidarity does occur between faiths, however it still seems likely that a common faith will result in greater levels of empathy between separatists and state.

\textsuperscript{221} The logic here is similar to Kant's democratic peace, where populations relate to one another easier, trust one another more, and will have greater sympathies with common political systems.
\textsuperscript{222} Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, The Republican Revolt. 141.
\textsuperscript{223} Kazi Mahmood, “Aceh Bombings Mars Indonesian Independence Day” Reuters (17 August 2001).
Institutions

Finally, national religious institutions and organizations tend to unify adherents, mitigating the chances of religious conflict. Religious leaders in separatist regions foster personal contacts, sometimes even dependency, with groups in the host state. They will be less willing and less able to become politically active due to common beliefs, friendships, and networks. As noted by Aspinall, "the only nation-wide organizations with popular support in Aceh today are Islamic: Muhammadiyah, HMI, PPP, and PAN." In addition to this list, many Muslim schools, such as IAIN al-Raniry, are part of national religious networks, limiting their ability to support the separatist cause. Although Aspinall is correct that the strongest national organizations in Aceh are religious, this does not say much. In Chapter 4, I detailed the troubled history of Indonesian religious organizations in Aceh. The majority of religious organizations in Aceh, both throughout history and today, are local. Acehnese distrust for foreign religious influence and pride in local practice lessens the explanatory power of the common religion hypothesis in explaining Acehnese secularism.

A common religion will no doubt lessen the possibility of a religious separatist conflict. Sharing a common faith will result in fewer religious grievances, make differentiation more difficult, increase empathy between communities, and create institutional linkages between regions. As noted by Aspinall, concepts such as the Ummah draw Muslims together and make religious conflict between them less likely. The universe of separatist cases presents strong evidence that sharing the same religion is immensely important in determining the religious nature of conflicts. Each of these

\[224\] Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
factors are confirmed as contributing to Acehnese secularism, but the perceptions of Acehnese religious identity limit them from being sufficient explanations.

There are two views on the value of common faith in Aceh and Indonesia. While Aspinall asserts that "Islam remains the main force binding Aceh to the rest of Indonesia", Sjamsuddin argues that the "strong sense of ethnicity among the Acehnese did not make Islam function as an effective link bridging the Acehnese and other Muslim ethnic groups in Indonesia." These points are not necessarily competing; Aspinall is correct that Islam links Aceh to Indonesia. But this link is not strong enough to make it a convincing explanation for Acehnese secularism. Sjamsuddin’s statement is more accurate, however it requires an addition; religion is an aspect of ethnicity. This overlap between ethnicity and faith in Aceh allows for religious differentiation within Indonesia.

Islam is not monolithic. A common faith in name does not translate into a common faith in practice, or more importantly, in perception. It is instructive to look to Aspinall’s concluding comments:

Islam does not readily form a mark of cultural distinctiveness marking the boundary between the secessionists and the non-secessionist majority. Of course, there may be attempts in such cases to argue that the community seeking secession practice a particular form of Islam, or are more devout than the majority...such claims, however, do not sit easily with the universal message at the heart of Islam.

Aspinall puts too much emphasis on the Ummah as a binding force between Muslims and not enough emphasis on internal fissures. The Ummah is an ideal that is frequently ignored in practice. One need only turn to the millennia-old Shia / Sunni conflict, the

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225 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
226 Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, The Republican Revolt, 103. Anthony Reid makes a similar point about the relationship between the Acehnese and other Indonesians under the Dutch: “even the bond of Islam was insufficient to outweigh the prejudice against Indonesians who had come to Aceh.” Reid, The Blood of the People, 19.
227 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
struggles over fundamentalism and terrorism within Muslim communities today, or the Darul Islam Rebellion to see where the Ummah has failed to provide unity. Sharing the same religion is more likely to produce a secular conflict, but this likelihood is diminished when regions practice different variants, diverge in terms of orthodoxy, or when religion is mixed with ethnic identity. I conclude that common faith is a necessary factor to Acehnese secularism, but not sufficient.

In evaluating my first and second hypotheses, a glaring question arises: If the Aceh conflict is secular due to secular grievances or sharing a common faith, why does the GAM so consciously avoid religion? This leads me to my third and final hypothesis.

**Hypothesis C:** *A separatist conflict will remain secular if secular rebel leaders have the motivation and the power to shape the conflict.*

As stated in Chapter 3, ethnicity is generally sustained from below and mobilized from above. Of all ethnic traits, religion is most likely to be mobilized from below because it speaks to core aspects of psychology, meaning, and identity; it cannot be manipulated as easily by leaders due to competing religious authorities and codified beliefs. Elites do have some role to play in shaping the direction of religious mobilization, however they cannot dictate the specific form of religious identity or mobilization. In Chapter 4, I illustrated this process with three case studies, where religion was largely a product from below, although elites contributed to shaping public perceptions of grievances. Separatist leaders who ignored self-purification, such as the PULO and the MNLF, were frequently outbid by more religious groups. Insurgent

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228 In 1932, the Dutch Governor of Aceh put this in stark terms: the exclusiveness of the Acehnese and his strongly developed sense of his own worth will, I predict, in the long run persuade him of the advantage of being bound to us rather than being absorbed into one Indonesian people.” Cited in Reid, *The Blood of the People*, 26.
groups such as the new PULO or Abu Sayyaf who went too far towards foreign causes or terrorism did so at the risk of public support.

Hypothesis C speaks against the idea that religious mobilization generally occurs from below, suggesting that the Free Aceh Movement has been able to steer the conflict away from religion. Does Aceh represent a case where elites have socially constructed secular grievances despite the importance and orthodoxy of local practices? How would this occur? This is an unlikely path, which in Aceh required several necessary conditions.

**GAM Strategy**

For rebels to desire a secular conflict, it is likely that they will have secular backgrounds, namely secular education, as well as secular interests, namely secular alliances and resources. In historical Aceh, leaders such as Daud Beureueh were religious teachers whose students made up the rank and file of the Darul Islam Rebellion. Early separatist leaders in Thailand and the Philippines were partly educated in local religious schools, an influence which was apparent in their occasional use of religious symbolism. Later separatist leaders from the New PULO, MILF, and Abu Sayyaf were almost entirely educated in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt. Islamic conflict requires leaders with Islamic credentials who can legitimately speak on religious matters.

The GAM leaders have secular, Western educations, unique among regional separatist groups. The GAM is not totally without religious foundations. Many members received primary education in Acehnese religious schools. Interestingly, Hasan di Tiro spent some time in Daud Beureueh’s madrasah. From here, almost all of these leaders went on to Java or Malaysia for secular high school education, many continuing to the Netherlands or the United States for graduate degrees. The GAM leaders are foreign
educated, wealthy, and have spent only a handful of years in their homeland. In the words of di Tiro, they are “at home in the West as much as in the East.” GAM leaders have a pragmatic interest in a secular conflict because it lacks the legitimacy to speak on religious issues.

The GAM leaders not only have secular strategies, but I make the deeper claim that they have secular ontologies. The GAM’s normative framework resembles what Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell label ‘normative isomorphism’—they have internalized the worldviews they were socialized with. The GAM leaders believe that “to interject religious issues, especially when in fact there are none, to a legitimate independence struggle is to undermine it.” In the minds of the GAM leaders, the only viable option for Aceh is to become a secular nation-state; they view Islamic separatism as less likely to succeed and less legitimate.

Another reason the GAM avoids religion is that the powerful Ulama are at odds with the rebels. In most separatist conflicts, religious organizations support and sometimes even lead the separatist cause. The Dutch War and Darul Islam Rebellion were led by religious teachers. In southern Thailand and the Philippines, some religious leaders covertly support separatist groups, although they have turned their backs on more extremist groups. If religious groups support a separatist conflict, actively or passively, it is more likely that insurgents will utilize religious resources and symbols.

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Acehnese Islam represents a rival power structure to the GAM rebels, diverging with them in terms of their backgrounds, goals, and methods. Hypothesis B (shared religion) is relevant here because some Muslim groups are part of Indonesian networks, so this opposition is strengthened. But as stated, most religious organizations in Aceh are local. Many Acehnese Islamic organizations formally oppose the GAM as well as the TNI based on “peaceful action linked with Islamic teachings (Aksi Dami Yang Islami).”\(^{232}\) A group of Acehnese Ulama formed the HUDA based on the belief that human rights violations are contrary to Islam. The HUDA works closely with student groups, supporting a referendum on Acehnese independence.\(^{233}\) The GAM leadership faces formidable opposition from religious groups, to the extent that the rebels are believed to have assassinated activist Ulama such as Dayan Dawood. GAM leaders believe that the Ulama are “easily bought off by flattery, political recognition and material rewards from the government” but generally avoid direct confrontation with religious leaders.\(^{234}\) This rivalry forces the GAM to avoid religion so that it does not have to compete with the Ulama for religious legitimacy.

Another necessary ingredient for Aceh’s secular conflict is that rebel leaders have secular alliances. If rebel leaders have secular interests but lack ongoing secular ties, they may still make use of religious issues even if they do not believe in them. Western allies represent an investment in secularism which gives the GAM a further interest in maintaining a secular conflict. In Thailand and the Philippines, Islamic separatist groups receive funding from foreign Muslim organizations, principally Wahabi money from


\(^{233}\) Crow, “Aceh: the ‘Special Territory’ in North Sumatra.”

\(^{234}\) This tension mirrors a long-standing struggle in Aceh between the business class and religious teachers. Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
Saudi Arabia. They have each gained tremendous diplomatic and financial support from Muslim governments. Extremist groups have sent hundreds of thousands of dollars to Moro groups through shell organizations such as al-Qaeda’s International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). Muslim separatists have continued interests in an Islamic agenda not only due to their worldviews, but also due to their ongoing alliances.

Conversely, “GAM has not received significant support either from an Islamic state or an Islamic armed group.” An important exception is Libya, where the GAM trained from 1983-1988. This said, Libya was officially secularist, training militant groups regardless of their religious origins. According to Aspinall, “given his early experiences at the UN and studying at Columbia University, Hasan Tiro has always placed great emphasis on international law and the UN system.” GAM backgrounds led to an early investment in Western support which is now locked in. The GAM is based in Europe, relies on Western diplomatic support, sits in on countless United Nations subcommittees, canvasses NGO support, works with Western media, and is funded by business interests. Its foreign strategy is based not on religion, but on the right to self-determination and justice for human rights violations. If the Aceh conflict became Islamic, the GAM would likely lose its support base. The GAM leaders therefore have a vested interest in maintaining a secular conflict.

**GAM Policy**

The above factors are have made the GAM leaders want to avoid religious issues in their separatist struggle. How have they done so? For a rebel group to construct

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237 Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh.”
certain issues, it must have sufficient power to make its agenda dominant. A high level of factionalism in southern Thailand and the Philippines barred the PULO and MNLF from achieving hegemony, allowing them to be outbid by religious factions. The GAM is unique because it currently enjoys hegemony. As noted, GAM leaders have not been immune from factionalism within its leadership and on the ground. Their power was contested throughout the 1990s, with the MP-GAM and FMIA increasingly leaning towards religion as a means to compete with the more powerful ANSLF-GAM. But even at the height of factionalism, the ANSLF-GAM has enjoyed clear advantages in funding and organization, allowing it to control its opposition.

The year 1998 represents a critical juncture for the Aceh conflict. The Asian Economic Crisis brought about the fall of Suharto and benefited the secular ANSLF-GAM. This was the only faction based outside of Asia, so its foreign currency reserves expanded an existing economic advantage. When Western countries took an active role after the crisis, the GAM's connections and knowledge allowed it to become the sole representative of Aceh in peace dialogues.\(^{238}\) The ANSLF-GAM's advantage in 1998 also allowed them to engage Indonesian leaders such as Gus Dur during the brief window of opportunity created by the fall of Suharto. The GAM used this power quickly, assassinating the leaders of other factions, expanding recruitment, and monopolizing the title of resistance. The critical juncture in 1998 resulted in ANSLF-GAM hegemony in Aceh. This makes the GAM unique among regional separatist organizations, allowing it to shape the conflict according to its interests.

The GAM has the motivation, political will, and the power to maintain a secular agenda in the conflict. How does it carry this out? To avoid challenges to their agenda,

the GAM leaders have been active in socially constructing a secular history, culture, and a secular rationale for the conflict. The GAM’s social constructions have not been entirely successful; few Acehnese believe that Aceh was a state 3000 years ago or use the English term ‘good’ in daily conversation instead of the Bahasa Indonesian ‘bagus.’ But the direction of GAM constructivism—towards ethnic nationalism and away from religion—has been largely successful. As a result, even opposition groups are limited to debate that falls within the parameters set by the GAM.\textsuperscript{239} NGOs and other civilian movements have internalized the discourse and Western focus of the GAM, even though they rarely see eye-to-eye with the rebels. The GAM’s approach has been to nurture Acehnese ethnic nationalism and to marginalize religious traits.

While instrumentalist leaders do not have the power to invent ethnic traits, they do have the power to shape them. It is especially difficult to construct religious identity, but Aceh provides an exception as a result of a powerful sense of Acehnese identity, which includes but is not limited to Islam. This identity provides a wealth of resources for socially constructing ethnic nationalism, a concept which resonates among the public. Acehnese nationalism is a powerful aspect of Acehnese identity, enabling the GAM to direct the conflict towards a source of unity during the conflict. The GAM has shaped this outcome through constructivism and by scapegoating the Javanese. The direction taken by Acehnese society is partly consistent with Geertz’ argument, but instead of religious purification, the GAM has directed Aceh’s response to uncertainty and violence towards secular nationalism. It has done so with a remarkable capacity for ignoring religious traits which previously defined Acehnese culture.

\textsuperscript{239} This is what John Gaventa labels the third face of power, where leaders shape circumstances so that rival worldviews never even materialize. John Gaventa, \textit{Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980).
There is nothing natural or deterministic about ethnic violence, despite its prevalence throughout the world. As summarized by Milton Esman, “the mere presence of two or more ethnic communities in the same political space does not necessarily signify conflict.”\textsuperscript{240} The current conflict and its continually emerging ethnic elements are a result of both instrumentalism and primordialism. Although religion is not easily mobilized from above, Aceh constitutes a deviant case. This is possible because the GAM has not shaped religious identity but instead has avoided it, a direction made possible by a preexisting sense of Acehnese identity.

Hypothesis A—that a secular conflict will remain secular if there are no religious grievances—is by itself unable to explain Acehnese secularism. Because the interpretation of grievances relies on perception, there must be a prior cause to Acehnese secularism. Hypothesis B is largely confirmed: A common religion has contributed to the secular conflict by shaping grievances, differentiation, empathy, and institutional linkages. But as a result of Aceh’s history of religious differentiation from Indonesia, this explanation is incomplete. Hypothesis C is also confirmed: The GAM has reason to promote secularism, has the power to do so, and actively constructs secular discourse. This hypothesis seems most convincing in accounting for the secular conflict; Acehnese secularism is largely a result of GAM instrumentalism.

\textsuperscript{240} Milton J. Esman, “Political and Psychological Factors in Ethnic Conflict,” Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies, 54.
Chapter 6 Implications

Despite theoretical, historical, and comparative suggestions, and despite what some writers assert, the Aceh conflict remains secular. It is secular for a number of reasons, namely that the GAM leaders have successfully channeled sentiment away from Islam and towards ethnic nationalism. What lessons does this deviant case teach? I conclude with some implications of my findings, divided into theory and practice.

Theoretical Implications

Acehnese secularism contributes to the two theoretical bodies discussed in Chapter 3. Returning to Eckstein's terminology, Aceh makes an excellent heuristic case study for the primordialism – instrumentalism debate, illustrating existing theories and suggesting how they are relevant to other theoretical approaches. Earlier, I cited Donald Horowitz and Joseph Rothschild who, along with several other writers, agree that ethnicity cannot be explained by any single approach. My analysis of Aceh suggests this is correct. This secular conflict includes important elements from many approaches, be they 'from above' or 'from below'.

Instrumentalism does not suggest that leaders are able simply to construct the world at their will. Leaders are limited by the available cultural resources. In Aceh, the GAM leaders have socially constructed the reasons for the conflict, but have done so based on a wealth of existing cultural traits.²⁴¹ The GAM has created an official nationalism which omits religion but includes several other preexisting elements of Acehnese culture. Some of the GAM's more fantastic claims, such as the age of the

²⁴¹ Further, these leaders are themselves partly the products of Acehnese culture. I have no doubt that the GAM believes in Acehnese nationalism and for "its particular grievances and aspirations to be utterly congruent with those of its ethnic group." Joseph Rothschild, Ethnopolitics: a Conceptual Framework (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 250.
Acehnese state, have been unsuccessful compared with those that resonate with local culture, such as the role of the Sultan. Structure is also important, as the closed, corrupt Indonesia system ended at a critical juncture in 1998, unleashing a simmering demand for change. The HDC peace dialogues then elevated the GAM above other factions, enabling it to continue to shape the conflict. Finally, the GAM has marginalized competing elites through violence and also by defining the terms of debate for the Acehnese resistance. In sum, the Free Aceh Movement demonstrates how top-down theories of ethnic mobilization operate. Leaders never have complete control, but given the opportunity, they can shape the direction of social and political change.

From below, GAM constructions are necessarily based on Acehnese cultural traits such as race, history, language, and mythology. Anthony Smith’s conception of social construction rings true: Invention “must be understood [as] a novel recombination of existing elements.” From a psychological prospective, the Acehnese community has clung to these traits as a result of uncertainty and because of a need to belong. Horowitz’ approach, where ethnic mobilization is based on a perception of “the fear of domination by ethnic strangers”, seems important for Aceh. The perception that the Javanese transmigrants, military, government, and corporations are exploiting the Acehnese people, a perception built on reality and GAM constructions, has made people more susceptible to blaming Jakarta and condoning what they see as defensive violence. In sum, Aceh helps demonstrate the relationship between several approaches to ethnic identity. Quite generally, ethnic identity is a product from below that can be mobilized from above.

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243 Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 188.
Turning to theories of religious mobilization, Aceh helps demonstrate and build theory. It is a deviant case study, meant to “uncover additional variables that were not considered previously.” Geertz’ theory is helpful, predicting that religious orthodoxy will grow in times of uncertainty, as witnessed in most separatist conflicts. However, Aceh shows that this process can be shaped by conflict entrepreneurs. This demands some modifications to Geertz’ approach. First, while religious change remains more difficult to manipulate than other national or ethnic markers, it can occur when leaders are able to bypass religion in favour of another deeply-held trait. The GAM has not attempted to construct an oppositional religious identity because: Indonesia is mostly Muslim, they have secular interests, and they face competition from the Ulama. GAM leaders have instead emphasized a prior sense of ethnic nationalism, sans religion—avoiding religion instead of co-opting it.

Second, Geertz’ bottom-up approach requires an instrumentalist qualifier. Choosing among his three paths to modernization (adopting foreign models, local nationalism, or purifying religious beliefs) depends on the public as well as on elites. Although the path taken must resonate with the public, elites can shape the outcome of popular reactions in some situations. In Aceh, instead of further religious purification, the path taken has been secular nationalism founded upon local ethnic identity because the GAM has helped expand feelings of ‘Acehnese-ness’. Just as there must be a balance between instrumental and primordial approaches in analyzing ethnic identity, religious mobilization cannot be explained by popular processes alone.

Practical Implications: The Future of Acehnese Islam

Some important questions remain: Have the GAM’s social constructions been successful? Will the GAM’s secular Acehnese nationalism endure as it loses its grip on power and its leaders grow old, or will Acehnese society turn to a more religious interpretation of its political situation? I believe that political Islam will become more salient in Aceh if the GAM weakens, although the change will occur within the rubric of Acehnese ethnic nationalism. There are signs that the Acehnese continue to view the conflict through a religious lens. Villagers are known to refer to the TNI as “Dutch infidels” (*sipaie*). During the American invasion of Iraq, Acehnese students held large protests and claimed solidarity with the Iraqi Muslims. The GAM responded with anger, urging protesters to focus on the Aceh conflict and what is happening “in front of their eyes.” The influence of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an anti-corruption, modernist Islamic party, continues to grow in Aceh.

Finally, the tsunami has created a greater interest in religion. Many Ulama are convinced that the tsunami was punishment for corruption, moral laxity, insufficient prayer, and years of “Muslims killing Muslims.” After the disaster, only the mosques were left standing, becoming immediate sites for refugee camps and symbolizing a message from God. The tremendous loss of life on 26 December 2004 has resulted in a

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246 Edward Aspinall, “Islamic Brotherhood, Nationalism, and Separatism in Aceh,” presented at *Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia*, organized by the East-West Center (June 16-17 2003).

247 Edward Cody, “Indonesian Devout See Warning in Disaster,” *Washington Post* (4 January 2005). This response can be compared to the widespread belief in the 1870s among Ulama that the Dutch invasion was “part of a condition of Atjehnese society that springs from the neglect of religion.” James Siegel, *Shadow and Sound: the Historical Thought of a Sumatran People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 232.
greater need for religion, the prime source of certainty, community, and resilience among the Acehnese people.

A growing popular interest in Islam will no doubt seep into the conflict if the aging GAM leadership loses its grip on power. But I do not expect the GAM’s constructions to disappear. Acehnese ethnic nationalism predates GAM constructivism; it is a deeply held aspect of Acehnese identity. Ethnic nationalism has grown, not only due to the GAM, but also in opposition to an Indonesian state that has treated the region so unfairly. These concepts are not oppositional; ethnic nationalism will likely survive, but take on more Islamic characteristics. Strategies such as the language of self-determination, the importance of Western allies, and the human rights discourse will likely outlive the GAM because these concepts are not the property of the GAM alone. Although several secular constructs have been created and mobilized by the GAM, these strategies have developed new stakeholders, such as NGOs, which will continue to support them independently of the GAM.

I expect that a religious resurgence will occur within the rubric of a strong Acehnese ethnic nationalism, providing no clear victory for top-down or bottom-up approaches. It will likely be a slow shift, incorporating GAM strategies with Islamic concepts such as of human rights or anti-corruption. There are several reasons that an Islamic resurgence as part of Acehnese ethnicity is especially likely. First, this is consistent with Acehnese history, where outside religious practice is suspect. Second, Indonesia’s attempts to Islamicize the conflict will push a jaded public away from this bond. Islamic militias will not find fertile soil, and even though Sharia law will be
popular, its Indonesian parentage will likely be ignored. There will likely be a greater appreciation of Islam within Aceh’s history, culture, and future as the conflict endures.

Perhaps paradoxically, this presents an opportunity for peace building and for the Ulama. In his study of community peace-building, Mohammed Abu-Nimer advocates a greater appreciation of Islamic concepts of peace and justice, using local religious leaders as mediators, and reversing dominant perceptions of the faith. This does not mean that Islam should be considered a pacifist religion, but instead that it offers resources that can be used for war or for peace. Given the 2005 high-level peace talks in Finland, there is an urgent need for an equivalent process at the village level. Abu-Nimer believes that “middle-range community analysis and activity are most valuable for the study of peace building in Islamic contexts.” This is also the advice of David Little and Scott Appleby, who believe that even in secular conflicts, local religious leaders “have been more successful in bringing disputants together and mediating productive negotiations.” They argue that this has been especially effective between Muslims.

In Aceh, the Ulama retain a great deal of legitimacy among the people. They are critical of both Indonesia and the GAM, advocating peaceful solutions to the separatist war. I noted earlier that common GAM fighters are more religious than their leaders. I have also noted that peace dialogues in Aceh have lacked representation and have been too detached from the community. If indeed Aceh does enjoy a resurgence in faith, community dialogues through Islam offer many benefits: Ensuring peace talks are not limited to the TNI and GAM leaders, involving and mobilizing the community, using

trusted mediators, exemplifying peaceful traditions within the Islamic faith, and saving lives. A resurgence of Acehnese Islam is an opportunity for peace that cannot be ignored and requires further investigation.

Increasingly, observers are coming to appreciate that conflicts are about more than raw power and strategy. Although material interests remain fundamental to understanding conflict, they usually require a perception of discrimination to be rendered meaningful. Ethnic identity is now frequently accepted as a contributing factor in the creation, complexity, intensity, likelihood of, and foreign involvement in, many conflicts. Islam is especially considered to be an important factor in many conflicts; the faith is coloured by negative stereotypes and is more likely to be mobilized than other religions. Aceh presents a deviant case, where a devout Muslim population has not turned to religion in a time of war. This deviant case presents a valuable opportunity to learn more about the role of ethnic identity in conflict in general—its origins as well as its mobilization and presents an opportunity to explore the peaceful potential of religion.
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Figure 1- Map of Aceh

Figure 2- Map of Southern Thailand
Figure 3- PULO Flag and Coat of Arms

Figure 4- Map of Southern Philippines

Figure 5- MNLF and MILF Flags
Figure 6- GAM Map of Aceh

Figure 7- GAM Coat of Arms

Figure 8- GAM Flag