

# MUSLIM PHILIPPINES: WITH REFERENCE TO THE SULUS, MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONTRADICTIONS, AND THE MINDANAO CRISIS

BY ASIRI J. ABUBAKAR

## INTRODUCTION

The history and culture of the Moro People have been constantly attacked in this country ever since the days of the Western colonizers. This has been the case even up to this day because some aspects of Philippine institutions, like history and economics, still cling to the colonial legacies of discrimination and prejudice. As such, the Muslim masses in Morolandia are still lagging in many aspects of human life. There is restlessness in their midst which may burst into a mass discontent.

This paper is being written for the interests of the Filipino nation whose members are victims of the colonial legacies of hatred and prejudice. Its primary purpose is to trace and analyze the origins of the Muslim-Christian contradictions that, in one way or the other, serve as the root causes of the Mindanao Independence Movement. This movement should be discussed in the open and viewed in its proper perspective. Unless the root causes of this movement are traced and analyzed, no proper solution can be made to meet it. We cannot ignore the impact of this movement to the suffering Muslim masses. And besides, we cannot be sure whether it will die a natural death or cease to be a problem of this Republic.

In order to trace the origins of the Muslim-Christian contradictions, I start with a brief account on the history of the Sulus, the first of the early Philippine natives to receive Islamic ideology and to establish the "first organized government in the Philippines"—the Sultanate of Sulu. What is shown here is only the Sulus' struggle against the Western colonizers and how the Spaniards and, later, the Americans, with their colonial "divide and rule" policy, successfully ruined the centuries-old political institutions of the Sulus. The history and socio-political institutions of the Maguindanao and Buayan sultanates are not discussed here. Historical accounts reveal that the Muslim sultanates in the south shared common historical experiences and institutions.

It is hoped that by showing the impact of Islamic Ideology to the Sulus and how such ideology inspired their resistance against Western colonizers, the readers may be given enough background as to the socio-political and historical differences between the Muslims and the Christians of this country.

The word contradiction here is not used to mean religious differences. It is used here to mean the differences between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos mentioned above. The words "Moro" and "Muslim" are interchangeably used in this paper.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SULUS

##### *Who are the Sulus?*

The term Jolo is the Spanish misrepresentation of the word Sulu, sometimes written Sooloo. The natives call it *Sug* which means sea current or *Lupah Sug* (Land of the Current). But, historically, *Lupah Sug* does not only refer to the present Jolo Island. It is the appropriate designation for the archipelago as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Historically speaking, the Sulus referred to the different groups of people under the rule of the Sultanate of Sulu. They were the Tausugs (People of the Current), the Samals, the Badjaos (Sea Gypsies), the Jama Mapun of Cagayan de Sulu, the Yakans of Basilan, the people of Palawan and later, North Borneo.

Today, however, the Sulus include only the Tausugs, the Samals, the Badjaos and the Jama Mapun. The Tausugs are predominant in Sulu and they are the third largest Muslim group in the Philippines. They are divided into two sub-groups, the Gimbahanon (people of the interior) and the Parianon (people of the coast).<sup>2</sup>

##### *Sulu Before Western Contact*

Traditions in Sulu stated that before the advent of Islam, the Sulus worshipped stones and other inanimate objects and Sulu society was composed of many small communities. Each community was called Banua. The Banuas had their own territories with rulers and followers. They were relatively independent of each other. However, there were also alliances among them for purposes of trade and mutual defense.<sup>3</sup> These Banuas were similar to the *Barangays* of the pre-Spanish socio-political organization in the northern Philippine Islands. But the coming of Islam gradually changed the beliefs of the Sulus from polytheism to monotheism. And the establishment of the sultanate form of government unified their Banuas into a national community ruled by the Sultan.

History reveals that from around the end of the thirteenth century Sulu was already known to her Asian neighbors, particularly China, the rest

<sup>1</sup> Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, Inc., 1963), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Filipinas Foundation, Inc., *An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs* (Makati, Rizal: February 1971), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Isidro and Mamitua Saber, *Muslim Philippines* (Marawi City: University Research Center, MSU, 1968), p. 32.

of Malaysia,<sup>4</sup> and the Arab world, as she was already an active participant of the then international trade routes between the Malaysian islands and mainland Asia. The well-known participants in the Sulu trade were the Chinese and Arab traders. These traders brought Sulu's products (like pearls, pearl shells, tortoise shells, yellow beeswax, etc.) to their respective homelands, to other Asian countries, and possibly Europe. "The earliest Chinese account on Sulu belongs to the Yuan or Mongol dynasty (1278-1368) during which time there appeared an increase in direct trade relations between the Chinese and the Sulus."<sup>5</sup> Indeed the trade routes and the active participation of Chinese and Arab traders made Jolo one of the international trading ports then. And aside from having embraced Islam since the second half of the fourteenth century, the economic prosperity of the Sulus was another factor that primarily motivated the attempts of the Western colonizers to subjugate them since the later part of the sixteenth century because, commercially speaking, "Jolo, with the exception of Brunei, had no rival in northeast Malaysia prior to the seventeenth century."<sup>6</sup> However, in spite of the centuries-old contacts between the Sulus and the Chinese, their relationships remained basically commercial, as there was no evidence of Chinese political intrusions in Sulu.

Among the early trade partners of the Sulus, the Arabs were the ones who had left "deep imprints" on their lives and culture. Aside from trading with them, the Arabs, who might have come earlier than the Chinese, also performed missionary activities. Since travel in those days was not easy, it was possible that they stayed for quite a long time and even got married or lived in places where they happened to conduct business. Hence, "there existed during the last quarter of the thirteenth century if not earlier a Muslim settlement or community in Sulu."<sup>7</sup> Such settlement, which was mostly composed of foreign Muslim traders, would explain that as early as that period Islamic influences had already reached Sulu. And the same settlement must have helped much to facilitate the missionary activities of the learned men in Islam, the *Makhdumin*,<sup>8</sup> who arrived at Sulu at a later period.

The period from 1380 to 1450<sup>9</sup> marked the arrival of learned men in Islam and the rise of a centralized political bureaucracy in Sulu—the Sultanate. This period was highlighted by the coming of Karimul Makhdum,

<sup>4</sup> The implication of the word "Malaysia" here is an adoption of Dr. Cesar A. Majul's usage of the term in his new book, *Muslims in the Philippines*, in which he uses it in a geographical sense to include the Malay Peninsula, the islands comprising present-day Indonesia and the Philippine Archipelago.

<sup>5</sup> Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1973), p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Majul, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Makhdum (Makhdumin, plural) — means master in Arabic.

<sup>9</sup> This is the period of the Islamization of Sulu assigned by Saleeby in his book, *The History of Sulu*, pp. 42-48.

a missionary-scholar from Arabia, who came from Malacca and reached Sulu around 1380. Ten years after, Rajah Baginda, a Sumatran prince, with some learned men in Islam, arrived at Jolo island and settled in an area called Buansa which later on became the sultanate's first capital. Sayyid<sup>10</sup> Al-Hashim Abubakar (Abu Bakr) followed Rajah Baginda and around 1450 he established the Sultanate of Sulu. He became the first sultan with the title Paduka Mahasari Maulana Al-Sultan Sharif-ul-Hashim and all Sulu sultans claimed descent from him. At this period, therefore, Islam had already gained a very strong foundation in Sulu and with it the Sulus had attained the status of nationhood earlier than any other natives of the Philippine archipelago. Islam, which did not completely eradicate the pre-Islamic customs (Adat) of the Sulus, brought new knowledge, art, and culture. In brief, Islam gave the Sulus a more sophisticated sense of identity and, since they were Islamized, their sense of history and nationalism commenced.

The Sultanate of Sulu was the first organized or first "native state" in the Philippine archipelago. It lasted for almost five centuries, that is, from around 1450 to 1915.<sup>11</sup> At the height of its power, its territorial domains included the entire Sulu archipelago, Basilan, Palawan, some coastal areas of Zamboanga, and North Borneo.

The Sultan was the highest chief of state and he exercised both civil and religious authorities. The Sultan, however, was not an absolute ruler. In law-making and policy-making, he was assisted by the *Ruma Bichara*, the highest state-council composed of the *Rajah Muda*, the heir apparent, and some powerful royal datus. On administrative matters in various districts or island territories, he was assisted by the *Panglimas* whom he appointed with other lesser officials like the *Maharajahs* or *Ulangkayas*. In religious matters, he consulted the chief *Qadi* and the *Ulama* or *Imams* in various districts of his domains.<sup>12</sup>

### *Contact with and Response to the West*

As mentioned in the foregoing part of this paper, the Sulus (as well as the other Muslim principalities in the south) had already developed a much higher socio-political institution and culture than any other natives of the Philippine Islands before and at the time of the Spanish conquest. And, in the words of Saleeby, ". . . while Manila and Cebu were still small and insignificant settlements, Jolo had reached the proportions of a city and was, without exception, the richest and foremost settlement in the Philippine Islands."<sup>13</sup> Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the power of the Sulus was felt "all over Luzon and the Bisayan Islands, the Celebes Sea, Palawan,

<sup>10</sup> The *Sayyids* or *Sharifs* are the descendants of the Prophet.

<sup>11</sup> In 1915 Sultan Jamalul Kiram II formally relinquished his temporal powers over the Sulu Archipelago in favor of American rule under the so-called Carpenter's Agreement.

<sup>12</sup> A more detailed discussion on the political institutions of the Sulu sultanate is found in Majul's book, *Muslims in the Philippines*, pp. 311-337.

<sup>13</sup> Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

North Borneo, and the China Sea, and their trade extended from China and Japan, at the one extreme, to Malacca, Sumatra and Java at the other."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it should not be surprising to students of Moro history when the Sulus had immediately manifested a strong resistance against the forces of "Her Catholic Majesty" when the latter tried to subjugate the former. To the Sulus or the Moros, in general, they resisted any foreign attempt to subjugate them to preserve what they already had.

The coming of the Spaniards, with the dual purpose of Christianizing the natives and of extending the imperial domains of the Spanish monarchy,<sup>15</sup> stopped the gradual spread of Islam to the northern islands and cut off the political and commercial influences of the Sulus thereof. It also led to the socio-political and cultural separations of the Muslims from the rest of the natives. And what was worst, people of the same racial ancestry were made to fight and hate each other as evidenced by the so-called "Moro Wars", the long series of bloody wars between the Spaniards, aided by the Christianized natives in the north, and the Muslims in the south which lasted for more than three centuries. Together with those bloody struggles, the Spanish officials and scholars, mostly friars, also waged the darkest propaganda against the Moros like calling them "henchmen of the devil," "pirates", "bandits", "savages", etc.

The history of Muslim resistance against Spain is generally called "Moro Wars" by historians. The Sulus share a great portion of those life-and-death struggles "of all Muslim peoples in Malaysia against Western Imperialism, colonialism, and Christianity."<sup>16</sup> History reminds us that the Sulus resisted Spain until the doom of her colonial rule in the Philippines and extended such resistance even up to the first decades of this century during the American regime. Indeed, there was no stage of the "Moro Wars" wherein the Sulus had not fought.

The first contact between the Sulus and the Spaniards was at the last quarter of the sixteenth century during the reign of Sultan Pangiran Budiman. In 1578, seven years after the fall of Manila as a Muslim kingdom, Governor Sande sent Spanish troops headed by Figueroa to subjugate the Sulus on accounts of alleged "piracy" and for being followers of Islam.<sup>17</sup> The Sulus repulsed the Spanish forces. Thus, the state of war between the Sulus and the Spaniards and the former's immediate and violent response to Western Imperialism, colonialism and Christianity commenced.

Since the last quarter of the sixteenth century up to around the 1850's, a period of almost three centuries, the Sulus remained politically supreme in their own dominions even in spite of their later commercial and friend-

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Majul, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>17</sup> The reasons and purposes of the Figueroa's expedition are contained in Governor Sande's letter of instructions to Figueroa in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. IV, pp. 174-181.

ship alliances with the Western colonizers. The maintenance of such distinctive strength to resist foreign invasion was not, in all aspects, the making of the Sulus alone. In many periods of their resistance against Spain the Sulus were helped by the other Muslim principalities in Malaysia (Like the Sultanates of Brunai, Buayan, Maguindanao, and Makassar) or even the other Westerners like the Dutch. Two of the important events during this period that almost led to the Sulus' downfall could be mentioned here. In 1638, three years after the establishment of the Spanish port in Zamboanga, Spanish forces attacked Sulu during the reign of Sultan Mawallil Wasit I (Rajah Bungsu), one of the most outstanding Sulu sultans and a contemporary of the famous Sultan Qudarat of Maguindanao. The invaders were initially victorious because Jolo, for the first time, fell and the Sultanate was temporarily transferred to Tawi-Tawi island in 1639. But on accounts of Rajah Bungsu's aggressive leadership, his alliance with Makassar in 1638 and the Dutch in 1644<sup>18</sup> and the Koxinga threat in the north, the Spaniards were forced to leave Jolo and made truce with the Sulus in 1646. Another event occurred in the 1740's when Sultan Azim-ud-Din I, popularly known as Alimud-Din, "beguiled by flattery and impelled by greed at the offer of Spanish money and protection, accepted missionaries to his ultimate undoing and the loss of his throne."<sup>19</sup> However, Sulu's independence was maintained when Azim-ud-Din I was dethroned by his brother and successor Datu Bantilan, who reigned as Sultan Muiz-ud-Din.

Indeed, the confrontation between the Sulus or the Moro People, in general, and the Spaniards during the period under consideration could be considered "a war between more or less equal powers" as exemplified by "the truces and the treaties, capitulations and protocols between them, by the failure of either side to make any permanent annexations of territory, and the shifting alliances with pretenders and usurpers of the Muslim thrones and the other foreign powers in the region."<sup>20</sup>

The decline of the Sulus' organized resistance against Spain began in the 1850's. Since that period unequal treaties or agreements between the Sulus and the Western colonizers were in evidence. And the Sulus, as a group of people, were unable to recapture their political supremacy in their own traditional lands. This is not to say, however, that the yearning to resist Western Imperialism, colonialism, and Christianity culminated at that period. In fact, when organized resistance under the sultanate failed, individual resistance rose up as evidenced by the rise of "juramentados".

Before the 1850's the Sulus were already caught at the middle of the power play in Malaysian Islands of Western colonizers, the British and,

<sup>18</sup> Cesar A. Majul, "The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People," *Asian Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (August, 1966), p. 312.

<sup>19</sup> Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines: Present and Future Prospects* (Manila: Convislam Publication), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Ma. Guerrero, "Philippines: Conflict of Culture," *The Asian*, No. 67 (January 14-20, 1973), p. 7.

to a certain extent, the Dutch and the French on one hand, and the Spaniards on the other. The first stage of British and French interests in Sulu was primarily commercial. Later, however, they also demanded territorial concessions as "exemplified in the cession of Balambangan and the first cession of the North Borneo territories of the Sulu Sultan"<sup>21</sup> to the British in the 1760's. The French ambition was "shown by their desire to purchase the island of Basilan from Sultan Pulalun in 1844 and 1845."<sup>22</sup> The Dutch were also exerting efforts to assert their influence over the Borneo territories of the Sulus. The Spaniards were, as usual, interested in Christianizing the Moros and extending their political sovereignty to Morolandia.

Such colonial pressures on the Sulus had affected their political affairs, particularly their foreign policies, as seen in the rift between the two brothers Azim-ud-Din I and Muiz-ud-Din (Datu Bantilan) in the 1740's. Datu Bantilan, a pro-British, dethroned Azim-ud-Din I for being pro-Spanish to the extent that he even allowed missionaries to enter Jolo. To him, the British appeared as the "lesser evil" since they were not interested in the extirpation of the Sulus' beliefs, political institutions, and culture. He believed that the integrity of *Dar-ul-Islam* and Sulu's independence "could be attained by close relations with English who could be considered as sources of material aid against persistent Spanish aims at domination."<sup>23</sup> Since then, therefore, the Western colonizers had initially succeeded in asserting some influences in the Sulu affairs. This does not mean, however, that Sulu affairs were determined or dictated by the colonizers. It only means that, since the days of Azim-ud-Din I and the fall of other Muslim sultanates in Malaysia to the hands of the Western colonizers, some of the succeeding Sulu sultans started to look towards these colonizers for commercial and political alliances, with the thought that even with such associations they could still enhance Sulu's economic progress, maintain her political independence, and ultimately, defend the integrity of *Dar-ul-Islam*. Such associations, however, proved to be disastrous later.

On the pretext of "piracy", the over-used excuse of the Spaniards, and the alleged increase of British influence in the Sulu affairs as a consequence of the commercial treaty concluded between the Sulu sultan and James Brooke in 1849, Jolo was attacked and burned by the Spaniards in 1851 during the reign of Sultan Mohammad Pulalun. It must be recalled that prior to 1851 the Sulus and the Spaniards had concluded a treaty in 1836 which was "mainly an alliance of friendship for mutual aid and protection, and the regulation of duties vessels had to pay in Manila, Jolo, and Zamboanga."<sup>24</sup> From what the Spaniards did to the Sulus in 1851, it appeared that they ratified the 1836 treaty with the Sulus so that the latter

<sup>21</sup> Majul. "The Role of Islam..." p. 313.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Moro Documents: Mindanao and Sulu*, Filipiniana Section, U.P. Library.

would stop attacking them and they would have enough time to consolidate their forces, like the purchase of gunboats in the 1840's. It seemed that one of the military strategies of the Spaniards was that when they were weak, they asked for treaties, and when they became strong, they attacked the Moros.

Unsatisfied with the results of their 1851 campaign, the Spaniards attacked Jolo again in 1876, burned the city, stationed a large garrison there, and occupied it permanently until 1899 when the Americans arrived to replace them. The Sulus were badly defeated and the Sultanate was transferred to Maimbung. The Sultanate ultimately became a protectorate as a consequence of the 1876 treaty which was the primary basis of the Spanish claim of sovereignty over the Sulu archipelago.<sup>25</sup> The Spaniards did not destroy the sultanate because they could use it as a tool to pacify all the Sulus. They "refused to recognize any body as Sultan unless he came to Manila, swore allegiance to the Spanish Government, and received his appointment from the Governor General."<sup>26</sup> A case in point was that of Datu Harun Ar-Rashid who was proclaimed Sultan of Sulu at Malacañang by the Spanish authorities in 1886.<sup>27</sup>

As shown above, the Sulu's defeat in 1876 marked the end of their organized efforts to resist Spain. Due to Spanish pressures and bribery, the royal datus were now divided in their struggle for power in the Spanish-controlled sultanate. Indeed, the sultanate since that period ceased to be the rallying point of the Sulus' centuries-old resistance against Western Imperialism, and colonialism.

When the Americans arrived at Jolo in 1899 to replace the Spaniards, the Sulus, who stood as one for centuries, were already divided. The datus of Patikul were opposed to the datus of Maimbung. Some lesser officials like the *Panglimas*, *Maharajahs* and *Ulangkayas* started to break away from the fold of the sultanate and later staged a series of revolts against the Americans.

To prolong their rule and accomplish their colonial ambitions, all that the Americans did was to continue the colonial "divide and rule" tactic of the Spaniards. They gave concessions to those who cooperated with them, particularly the ruling elite. They severely punished those who opposed them as exemplified in the Hassan Uprising (1903), the Battle of Taglibi (1903), the Usab Rebellion (1905), Pala Rebellion (1905), the Battle of Bud Dahu (1906), and the Battle of Bud Bagsak (1912).<sup>28</sup> In those series of revolts hundreds of Suluans (mostly Tausugs, including women and children) were massacred by the Americans. Those who fell in those revolts,

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 306.

<sup>28</sup> Detailed accounts of these revolts are found in Samuel Tan, "Sulu Under American Military Rule, 1899-1913," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, XXXII, No. 1 (March, 1967), pp. 55-87.



particularly the leaders, are well remembered by the Sulus today in their *Kissas*<sup>29</sup> which are usually sung or narrated during special gatherings.

### *Muslim-Christian Contradictions*

Based on the historical narrative of the Sulus' response to Western Imperialism and colonialism, it could be categorically stated here that the present contradictions between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos are the consequences of the Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines and the "Moro Wars." History shows that Spain was never satisfied with having colonized and Christianized the natives in the north. And so, to accomplish her colonial ambitions in the entire Philippine archipelago, Spain, with the help of the Christianized natives who were then called *Indios*, had to wage wars against the Moros in the south. Those wars would explain the religious character of the Moro-Indio contradictions during the Spanish colonial regime. But such contradictions take new forms today as Muslims find themselves being "integrated" into the so-called Filipino national community. They could be seen in the following:

1) Contrary to the position of contemporary Filipino historians, the Moro People assert that their struggles against Western Imperialism and colonialism constitute an integral part, if not the primary basis, of the history of the development of Filipino nationalism and nationhood.

It can be generally stated here that established Filipino historians have grossly misinterpreted the Moro People's resistance against any foreign attempts to dominate them. Such resistance is usually associated with "slave raids" and "piracy", as if the Moros only fight for booty and nothing else. This unfair description serves as the continuous dividing line between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos. Because of this, the image of the Moros remains darker in the eyes of some Christians. To illustrate this point, it might be interesting to invite the attention of the readers to how Agoncillo and Guerrero briefly describe Moro resistance against Spain:

"The Moros', as they were derisively referred to by the Spaniards, retaliated by pillaging coastal towns under Spanish control and carrying off hundreds of defenseless natives for sale in the slave markets of Borneo and the East Indies. Muslim raids often depopulated the fringes of the colony and resulted in the neglect of agriculture and industry in these areas."<sup>30</sup>

The occurrence of piracies within the maritime dominions of the Moro People could not be denied, as there were also piracies in almost all the seas at that time. But piracy was never encouraged or it was never an official policy of the Muslim sultanates, as many scholars claimed who based their writings mainly on Spanish sources. It is interesting to note

<sup>29</sup> Sulu ballads.

<sup>30</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1970), p. 125.

that in all their attempts to subjugate the Moros the Spaniards always used piracy as one of their excuses. And it is also equally interesting to note that in some of the treaties between the Moros and the Western powers (like the Spaniards, the British, and the Americans), the Moro governments strongly indicated their dislike of piracies in their domains and promised to curb them.<sup>31</sup> In the words of Dr. Cesar Majul:

“The Spanish claim that the Moro Wars were launched primarily to curb piracy on the part of the Muslims is also questionable. The sultans, as traders, were perhaps more interested than the Spaniards in keeping the trade lanes safe for all. It is true that there were Sulu and Iranun pirates, but these gave the sultans cause for concern too, in common with the Spaniards who wanted them eliminated. If the sultans failed to curb piracy, it was simply due to the same technical difficulty that the Spaniards themselves faced. The Spaniards found it convenient to blame piracy on the sultans, and they used this as an excuse for invading Muslim lands and territories.”<sup>32</sup>

On the issue of piracy within the domains of the Sulus, British Governor of Labuan during the early 1870's had this to say:

“A piratical population is still to be found in the island of Mindanao and in some smaller islands off the island of Tawi-Tawi and the east coast of Borneo. But the Sultan and the people of Sulu, it is well known here, are desirous of trade, of opening out trade and the rich resources of their country. So far from giving any shelter or countenance to pirates, for many years past the Government of Sulu have done their best to repress piracy, and have attacked and in some instances put down the pirates in other parts of the archipelago, and whatever piracy there is in the neighborhood is principally directed against Sulu traders.”<sup>33</sup>

Established Filipino historians have failed to note that the Muslims' resistance against Spain led to the ruin of their plantations, the frequent disruptions of their commercial activities with their neighboring states, and the depopulation or destruction of their settlements.<sup>34</sup> They have also failed to note the basic reason why the Muslims constantly raided the Spanish-controlled territories in Luzon and the Visayas. It must be recalled that throughout the Spanish colonial rule in the northern islands the Spaniards used the Christianized natives thereof to fight their wars against the Muslims. Hence, “it became essential and necessary for the Muslims to weaken this source of strength and aid to Spain.”<sup>35</sup> The so-called Philippine history speaks more of the heroism of Burgos, Rizal, Bonifacio, Aguinaldo, Luna, Mabini and others. But it is completely silent on the heroism of Rajah Sulayman of Manila, Sultan Mawallil Wasit I (Rajah Bungsu) of Sulu. Sultan

<sup>31</sup> Examples of these are the treaties between the Sulus and the Spaniards in 1836, with the Americans in 1842, and with the British in 1849.

<sup>32</sup> Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 344.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of Governor Bulwer of Labuan to Lord Kimberly, dated November 7, 1873, in *Papers Relating to the Affairs of Sulu and Borneo: Correspondence Respecting the Claims of Spain*, Part I (London: Harrison and Sons, 1882) pp. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Majul, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

Qudarat of Maguindanao, and Datu Utto (Sultan Anwar-ud-Din) of Buayan, to mention only a few of the Muslims' heroes during their various struggles against Spain and America. This leads the Moro People into thinking that in the eyes of this nation, heroism is the monopoly of the Christians in the north and that the heroism of their ancestors is not considered a basic factor that precipitated the birth of this nation.

The teachings in schools of only the history of the conquered people in the north, who are looked upon by the Moro People as the allies of Western Imperialism and colonialism in the more than three centuries of life-and-death struggles of their ancestors, lead them to believe that their heritage and history are not given due recognition. Except for brief accounts on the introduction of Islam and the "Moro Wars" in which the Moro resistance against Spain is associated with piracy, nothing more is written about them. One is tempted to say that Filipino historians, being victims of prejudice, find no sense of patriotism or nationalism in the Moro resistance against foreign interlopers that this nation may be proud of. They only see heroism and a sense of nationalism in the short-lived revolution of 1896 which they glorify as the only native movement that gave rise to the birth of the so-called Filipino national community. In the words of Dr. Majul:

"When some Muslims at present do not appear too happy in being called 'Filipinos', it is not that they do not desire to be involved or participate more intimately in the body politic; rather it is simply in recognition of the fact that their ancestors were never subjects of Felipe, the Spanish Prince who later became King of Spain. That other Christian natives are still willing to keep the name because their ancestors were subjects of the Spanish monarch, is no criteria why Muslims should follow likewise."<sup>36</sup>

2) The Moro People's plight to erase from the minds of greater number of Christian Filipinos the Spanish-oriented interpretation of the word "Moro" which is commonly associated with piracy and "juramentado" and with all the derogatory implications on the characters of the Muslims in the Philippines and Islam.

The Muslims of this country should not feel insulted when they are called Moros. However, any group of people always resents any word used to describe them if such word is associated with malice and derogatory implications. This attitude is not only true with the Muslims but also to any group of people, even the Christians. The Spanish usage of the word "Moro", the term they used to describe the Muslim inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago since the time of their conquest, has a long historical tradition:

"Moros are referred to as "Moors", Moriscos' or Muslims. "Moors' is a derivative of the Latin word 'Mauri' used by the ancient Romans to describe the inhabitants of the territory comprising the western portion of modern Algeria and the north-eastern portion of modern Morocco which in classical times, constituted the Roman province of Mauritania.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

“When Spain became a Muslim or Moro province under the Ummayyad Caliphate from July 19, 711 to January 2, 1492, covering a period of 781 years, the Muslim Spaniards were then called the ‘Moriscos,’ probably to distinguish them from the Moors of Morocco. To the Spaniards in Spain, the term ‘Moro’ did not originally carry any malice. But later on, Spaniards and Christian Filipinos infused into the word, by pressures from the clergy, the idea of malice.”<sup>37</sup>

The Spaniards applied the name Moros to the Muslims in the Philippines when they noticed the similarities of their faith, customs and traditions with the Moros of Spain and Morocco. With their traditional anti-Muslim attitude in their homeland, the Spaniards planted the same hatred in the Philippines. They taught the Christianized natives to hate the Muslims as enemies of their newly acquired faith and ways in life. Eventually, the word ‘Moro’ acquired fearful and violent connotations in the Philippines. We should bear in mind that the Spaniards did this to divide the natives and with the hope that with the support of the Christianized natives, they could attain the complete colonization and Christianization of the Philippine archipelago including Morolandia.

The character of a Moro is oftenly equated with that of a “juramentado” who, according to Western scholars and some native scholars who are sympathetic to the former’s view, is too happy to kill Christians. It must be noted that since the second half of the last century when the organized resistance against Spain had failed under the sultanate, the Moros, either individually or in small groups, continued their resistance against Spain to defend *Dar-ul-Islam*. The rise of the “juramentado” institution among the Sulus only occurred after the occupation of Jolo by the Spaniards in 1876 and when the Sultan and Royal Datus had more or less enlisted themselves with the side of Spain who promised to give them some concessions. Since the “juramentados” were out to dramatize their resistance against foreign domination, it was but natural, under such historical circumstances, that they killed Christians because those who guarded the Spanish garrison in Jolo since 1876 were the Christian natives recruited to serve in the armed forces of “Her Catholic Majesty.” It was not, as many claimed, an inherent trait among the Moros to kill Christians. It just happened that since the second half of the sixteenth century, the enemies of the Moros who were out to extirpate their beliefs, political institutions, and culture were the so-called “Christians.”

3) The economic, educational, and cultural disparities between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos.

Just like in most of the regions in the Philippines, the economic life of the Muslims in the south is primarily based on agriculture and, to some extent, fishing among those living in the coastal areas. But during the American regime, the Muslim traditional system of land holding was replaced

<sup>37</sup> Jainail D. Rasul, *The Philippine Muslims: Struggle for Identity* (Manila: Nueva Era Press, Inc., 1970), p. 23.

by a Western model. In those days, acquiring land titles was still alien to many Muslims, if not all. For centuries, land holding in Morolandia was governed by the customary laws (Adat) which recognized ownership of land without any title. Besides, most of the Muslims at that time had not fully accepted their identity as Filipinos and, as such subject to American-oriented Philippine laws. (In the case of Sulu, it only became a full-fledged member of the Philippine body politic in 1915 when Sultan Jamalul Kiram II formally relinquished his temporal powers over Sulu archipelago in favor of American rule.) Under such circumstances, it was easy for the Christian settlers from the north and influential persons in the government, both Muslims and Christians, to acquire land titles even over those areas traditionally occupied by the helpless Muslim masses.

“A study completed by the Senate Committee on Cultural Minorities (SCCM) in 1963 likewise points out to the significance of agrarian problems and their crucial role on Muslim-Christian relationship. According to this study, the provinces of Davao, Cotabato, Bukidnon, and the island of Basilan are the major trouble spots. Natives in these provinces have complained that they were being driven away by influential persons and big companies who have been awarded rights to lands long occupied and improved by members of the cultural minorities.”<sup>38</sup>

Aside from agrarian problems, there are also very limited opportunities for employment and education in Muslim areas. These problems continue to grow as many more Muslims are dispossessed of their lands. Due to poverty, many Muslims cannot afford to send their children to higher institutes of learning. Schools that could highly equip the Muslims with technical skills cannot be found in Muslim areas. With the exception of the Mindanao State University, higher schools in Muslim provinces, mostly run by religious orders, offer only non-technical courses. There are also less industrial firms in Muslim areas. But they are mostly found in the cities of Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, and Zamboanga which are predominantly inhabited by Christians.

The Muslims have different cultural values and taboos which are governed by their religion and customary laws. One of the basic cultural differences between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos can be seen in marriage. In marriage, Islam permits divorce and polygamy, while Christianity does not. However, Islam only allows divorce as a “bitter medicine” to cure unbearable situations in marriage life. The Prophet of Islam had even said: “Of all the things which have been permitted to men, divorce is the most hated by Allah.” Although polygamy is permitted in Islamic societies, the Qu’ran strongly recommends monogamy. In the practice of polygamy, the Qu’ran and the customs and traditions lay down restrictions or conditions which must be completely followed. Such restrictions or conditions would explain why only very few Muslim men in the Philippines take more than one wife.

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<sup>38</sup> Filipinas Foundation, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

*The Mindanao Crisis*

The crisis in Mindanao cannot be clearly understood without due consideration of the historical, economic, educational, and cultural differences between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos. No solution can be made unless this nation first reconciles these basic differences.

It is basically wrong to say that the conflict in the south is between Islam and Christianity. Islam does not teach its followers to hate believers of other religions. In fact, Islam teaches the good Christians, that is, the Christians in hearts and deeds, are the best friends of the Muslims. The Qu'ran says: ". . . and thou wilt certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians." (Sura V, v-82)

The Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) was organized by former Cotabato Governor Udtog Matalam on May 1, 1968 after the "Corregidor Massacre" of March that same year. Although the movement is something new, its history could be traced back to the American regime. Vic Hurley, an American soldier, had recorded statements of Moro leaders in his book, *Swish of the Kris*. Those statements would reveal to us the separatist sentiments of even some traditional Moro leaders and their opposition to the incorporation of their traditional domains to the present Republic. In 1910 during a meeting with the Americans, Datu Mandi of Sulu said: "If America does not want the Moro province, they should give it back to us, it is a Moro province, it belongs us."<sup>39</sup> Reacting to the Americans' desire to make Mindanao and Sulu as parts of the present Filipino national community, Datu Sacaluran, also of Sulu said: "I am old man now. I do not want any more trouble. But should it come to that, that we are given over to Filipinos, I still would fight."<sup>40</sup> In 1923, Muslims in Zamboanga City demonstrated during the celebration of Rizal Day and declared through their placards: "We Moros are not with the Christian Filipinos in their asking for independence. We wish our Moro country to be segregated from Luzon and the Visayan islands."<sup>41</sup> In 1935, Muslim leaders of Lanao gathered at Dansalan (now Marawi City) and made a protest to the United States government on the inclusion of Morolandia into what is now the Republic of the Philippines.<sup>42</sup> And in the early 60's, the late Congressman Ombra Amilbansa of Sulu sponsored bills in Congress to have Sulu declared a Republic.

The Mindanao Independence Movement takes new direction in the sense that its primary concern is the creation of an Islamic State out of the islands of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. It is now a struggle for cultural

<sup>39</sup> Victor Hurley, *Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1963), p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Alunan Glang, *Muslim Secession or Integration* (Manila: Cardinal Book Store, 1971), p. 65.

identity, political independence, and for a redefined national existence inspired by Islamic ideology.<sup>43</sup>

Among the principles invoked by the MIM to achieve its purpose is the principle of self-determination for people constituting the minority in a given state. This principle is recognized by the Charter of the United Nations and it is also the underlying principle in the Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>44</sup>

The MIM asserts that the Muslims being believers of Islam must have a definite territory of their own wherein they could exercise the tenets, teachings, and laws of Islam as ordained by the *Shariah* (Islamic laws as embodied in the Quran) and the *Sunnah* (Traditions of the Prophet).<sup>45</sup> Islam as a way of life and ideology does not separate the religious from the political aspects of human existence. As such, Islam regulates the spiritual, social, economic, political, educational and cultural activities of its adherents.

The MIM cites the senseless killings of the young Muslims from Sulu in the "second fall of Corregidor" and the terroristic activities of Christian "Ilagas," who perpetrated the Massacres of Muslims and the burning of their villages (including Mosques and Madrasas) as among the unforgivable injustices that the Muslims received from those who call them "brothers."<sup>46</sup> It also makes a protest against the government policy of encouraging settlers from Luzon and the Visayas to go to Muslim areas to the extent that the Muslims become a minority in their own ancestral lands. It also claims that the Muslims are capable of self-government and can stand as a nation and their economic progress and social development can be promoted by the Muslims themselves.<sup>47</sup>

Economically speaking, Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan can stand alone. The potentialities of these islands are enough to sustain viable independent state. The island of Mindanao is very fertile and rich in natural resources. Properly developed, Mindanao can supply sixty to seventy million people with food, shelter and clothing.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Muslims in the Philippines are people with a glorious past and they are very proud of that. Before the planting of Western culture in the north, the Moro People in the south, inspired by Islamic ideology, had already established well-developed socio-economic and political institutions as evidenced by the Sultanates

<sup>43</sup> *MIM Manifesto*, dated May 1, 1968, issued at Pagalungan, Cotabato and *MIM Constitution and By-Laws* in Appendices A and B of Glang's book, *Muslim Secession or Integration*, pp. 113-121.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Statements issued by MIM Secretariat to all Muslim Governments, Leaders, Ulama, and Journalists, dated August 5, 1971. (see Glang's *Muslim Secession or Integration*, pp. 148-152.)

<sup>47</sup> *MIM Manifesto* of May 1, 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Sixto Y. Orosa, "The Great Moro Problem," *The Philippines Free Press* (August 28, 1971), p. 124.

of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Buayan. It was Islam and those institutions that bound them together to resist any foreign attempt to subjugate them.

With the exception of their having the same racial ancestry, the Muslim and Christian Filipinos today have very little in common. The advent of Western culture removed most, if not all, their cultural similarities. The Spaniards brought with them a new culture and planted it in all the islands they conquered. The "divide and rule" policy of the Spaniards, that is, employing the services of the Christianized natives in their wars against the Muslims further enlarged the rift between the Moros and the Indios. The Moros were considered "uncivilized" and "savages" because they refused to accept Western culture, as if, it is only in knowing or accepting such culture that a group of people may be considered civilized. The Moros on the other hand, had also developed a derogatory term for the Indios. To the Moros then, the Christianized natives in the north were generally called "Bisaya", which means slave.

With the exit of the Spaniards, the Americans came with another Western order and ultimately deprived the Muslims of their long-cherished liberty and political independence. The Americans were only able to pacify the Muslims when they adopted the policy of non-interference in the latter's religious affairs. Through this, peace began to settle down in Mindanao and Sulu. But such peace is constantly interrupted as evidenced by the Kamlon campaign in the 1950's and the latest terroristic activities of the so-called "Ilagas."

The Muslims' resistance against Spain and America leads to the ruin of their plantations, the disruption of their commercial activities, and the depopulation and destruction of their settlements. The latest violence in Mindanao also leads to the same results. And the primary victims are the helpless Muslim masses.

Generally, the conditions of the Muslim masses today remain deplorable. There is still poverty and hopelessness. The Muslim masses, of course, could not entirely put the blame on the government. Part of their sufferings is of their own making, particularly their leaders who constantly play around with politics, who are corrupt and indifferent to the grievances of their constituents.

It could be stated here that if secession is the only answer to the problems of the Muslims, as some have proposed, the true secessionists are not the traditional leaders but the helpless Muslim masses who are oppressed, exploited, and down-trodden even by their own brothers-in-Islam in their own ancestral lands. These are the Muslims who do not hesitate to give up their Filipino citizenship, unless something is done to improve their conditions.

The contradictions between the Muslims and the Christian Filipinos should be reconciled for the interests of everyone and the nation. The Filipino people of this generation, including Muslims and Christians, must meet this challenge and a pressing need is for them to cast away the colonial legacies of hatred, discrimination and prejudice.



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