

INTRODUCTION

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I

The papers in this volume were delivered as lectures at a special seminar on **FILIPINO MUSLIMS: THEIR SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS** held at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines, from July to September 1981. This seminar is part of the continuing program of the Center on studies on **PHILIPPINE ETHNIC CULTURES**. It is hoped that through these lectures, delivered by experts on various areas of ethnic life-ways, students, educators, policy-makers, and educated laymen shall acquire broader knowledge about Filipino society and culture and shall develop a deeper sense of affinity with each other, thereby hastening the building of a national community.

The first of these lecture series has been focused on Filipino Muslims. Because of biased historical judgements in the past, the Filipino Muslims have been unjustly portrayed in academic literature and consequently suffer innumerable difficulties in asserting themselves as part of the mainstream of the national polity. For a long time, they were relegated to the status of "minority." It was only until recently that studies about Muslim culture have sought to bridge the gap between the Christian and the Muslim ethnic groups. Cultural ignorance generally breeds misunderstanding, prejudices and conflicts that rend us apart.

II

Traditionally, Filipino ethnic groups who have embraced Islam as a religion and a way of life have been classified as part of the "cultural communities." Perhaps this may be true for the smaller groups. However, for demographically large groups, like the Tausug, Maranao and Maguindanao, the classification is not appropriate. They should be classified along with the major groups, like the Tagalogs, Ilocanos and Bisayans. Only religion differentiates them from the rest of the Filipino population.

Filipino Muslims live in well-established settlements scattered throughout the island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. The highest demographic concentration of these people is in the provinces of Lanao, Cotabato, Davao, the Sulu Archipelago and in the neighboring islands of Basilan and Balabac. These groups are not ethnically homogeneous. They are known by many different names. Those occupying the regions along the banks of Simo-ai river from Cotabato to Davao and the riverine valleys of Labangan to Margosatubig in Zamboanga del Sur are known as Maguindanaon. The Maranao reside in the region around Lake Lanao, the northern coast of Iligan Bay and the southern coast of Lanao and Malabang. The region north of Simo-ai river in Cotabato, including the eastern region areas of Pecong, Illna Bay and Buldon are inhabited by the Iranuns. The Tausug populate the islands of the Sulu archipelago, southern Palawan, and in certain places in Davao and Zamboanga del Sur. Aside from these major groups, there are around five minor ones, namely: Sangil, Badjaw, Jama Mapun, Molbog Sama and Yakan.

There is marked social distinction among these ethno-linguistic groups. This is largely due to strong emphasis on local history and traditions, social organization and religion. For instance, the Tausug consider themselves superior to the other groups because they have a well-established political organization and they were Islamized earlier. The Maranao are proud for being the famous brassworkers in the area. The Maguindanaon are reputed to be relatively the better agriculturists. The Sama continue to maintain distance from the Badjaw. Thus, there are ethnolinguistic differences in even religiously homogeneous groups.

According to linguists, the dialects spoken in Sulu and some parts of Mindanao belong to the Central Philippine subgroup and are closely related to such major languages as Tagalog and Cebuano.

The subsistence pattern among these ethnic groups varies from diversified wet agriculture of the Maguindanaon and Maranao to well-developed fishing and pearl diving among the Sama and Badjaw. Commerce and trade are the principal sources of income among the Tausug and Jama Mapun.

Traditionally, political leadership among these people revolves around the *datu*, who is a combination of political leader, landlord, judge and religious functionary. The position of the *datu* is hereditary although the *datu's* authority is largely derived from his personal ability and community prestige obtained either through wealth or heredity. The *datu* owes allegiance to the territorial *sultan*, who occupies the highest social, political and religious status in society.

The modern Filipino Muslims are distinguished from their Christian neighbors in the manner of dress and other dominant cultural characteristics. The men usually wear headresses, with a white turban distinguishing those who had gone to Mecca on pilgrimage. The women, however, do not cover their faces with veils (*chador*) as among the Muslims in the Middle East. Pork and beverage are avoided in accordance with the prohibition of the Koran.

III

The Islamization of southern Philippines represents the earliest known exogenous culture to penetrate the archipelago during the pre-European contact and to establish a permanent politico-religious foothold in the country. There were many other people who came to the archipelago during pre-colonial times like the Indians, Siamese, and the Chinese. However, these people did not establish a foothold with powers to transform the indigenous culture to a new configuration. The Indians, with Hindu religious persuasion, brought in Hindu cultural orientation but this stopped short at folklore and religious beliefs. The Chinese influence was mainly in trade and food practices. However, the Muslims expressed themselves in institutionalized religious and political systems.

Scholars have presented several views for the Islamic expansion in the country. The first one looks at the phenomenon in terms of an individual sultanate developing its own external relations with other principalities in the archipelago. The second considers Islamization as part of the general spread of the religion in the entire Southeast Asia. Comparatively, the second proposition is the more accepta-

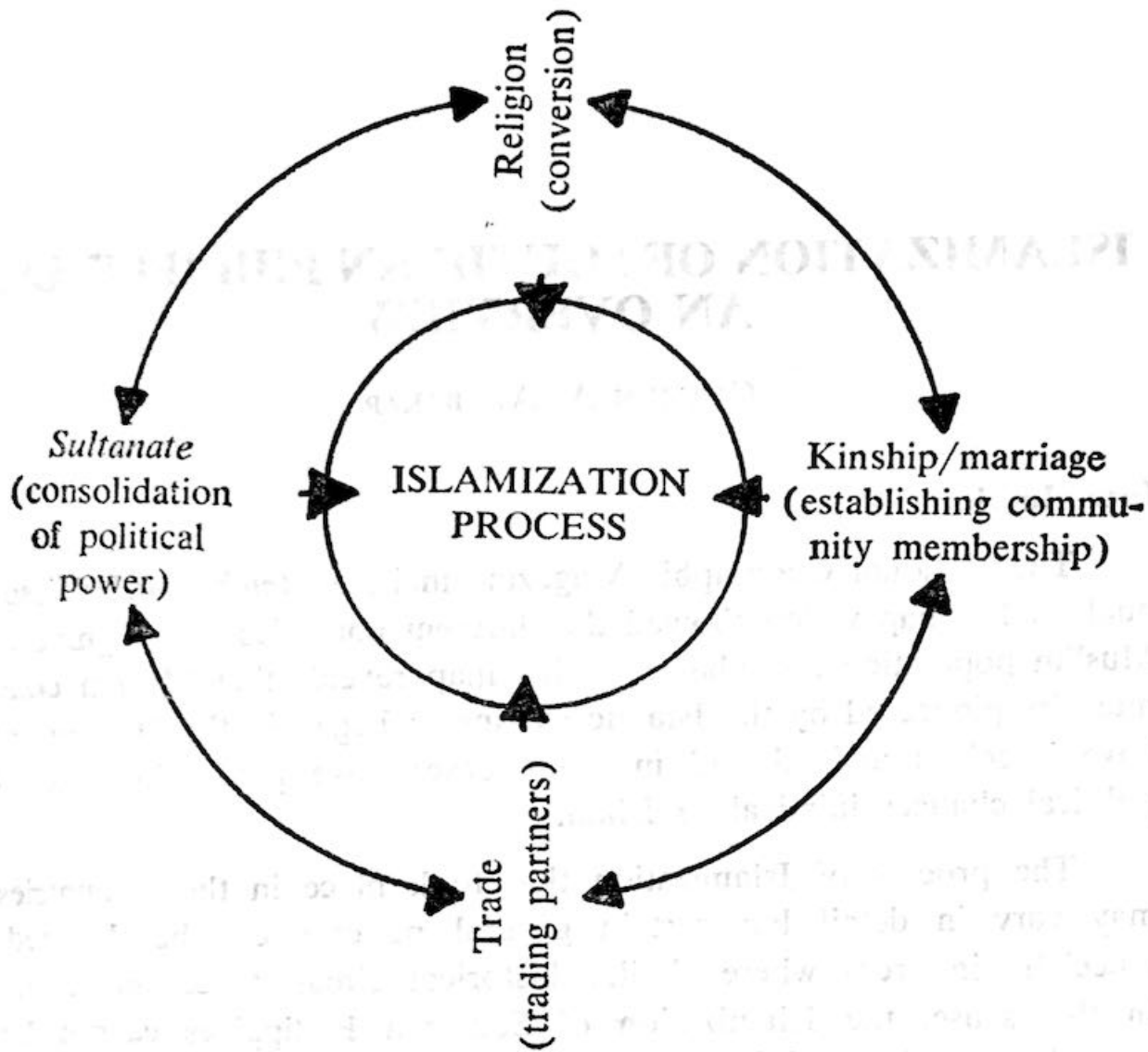
ble stimulus for Islamic intrusion in the country. As Professor Majul has argued: "The coming of Islam to the Philippines cannot be fully understood and appreciated except as part and possibly as the checked and frustrated process, of Islamic expansion from the north of Sumatra in its eastward course to the rest of Malaysia."

It needs to be pointed out that Islamic influence did not enter the country in full force as the Spanish and Americans did. Rather it filtered slowly but deeply. Historically, it started as early as the 13th century. Following an anti-Arab upheaval in South China, the Arab traders sought refuge to areas of Southeast Asia, hoping that as soon as tension eased they could go back to carry normal trading relations with the Chinese. Meanwhile, they established new trade routes with the neighboring islands of Insular Southeast Asia. As trading centers grew, "temporary way stations were established in the ports where the traders conducted business. In time, these temporary dwellings grew into permanent residence as their commercial interests in the area expanded."

As the residence became stable, the traders married into the families of their wealthy trading partners, making the partnership permanent. One of the trading ports where such strategy took place was Sulu. In fact, Sulu genealogy traces the introduction of Islam to Tuan Mashaika and later to Karim ul-Makhdum who did not only come to trade but also "to teach" the people about the new faith. The kinsmen of the families who were married to these foreign traders got "converted" first. From here on, the process of conversion was easy and it was facilitated through trade and commerce.

With the support from big and wealthy families, Islam spread throughout the area. With conversion came the consolidation of influence into political power. The communities which responded favorably to Islam were brought together under the *Mosque*, with the new faith as the rallying point. Islam became a new way of life. With political power, the Sultanate was introduced and the scattered *banuas* were brought together into a political community, the *bangsa* (nation). With strong economic base derived from trade, reinforced by firmly established religion, the new political system became entrenched and powerful. The Sultanate of Sulu was one of the three major sultanates which dominated the maritime trade in Southeast Asia during the 14th and 15th centuries. It was also able to resist the Spanish and American attempts, during the succeeding years, to bring it under their colonial control.

The process of Islamization of southern Philippines may be outlined as follows:



IV

Today, Filipino Muslims are taking active part in the development of a unified national consciousness—of being Filipinos, irrespective of faith and cultural backgrounds. The realization has come. There is a need to come to terms with ourselves. One can remain a good Muslim Tausug, Maguindanao and Maranao, among others, without being alienated from the ideals and aspirations of the country. Perhaps, it is in the continuous dialogues such as the seminar, in which these papers were delivered, that we all can gain a broader knowledge and a better understanding of each other as a people. It is from understanding and respect of each other's ethnic lifeways that we can draw wisdom, resiliency, and the strength to consolidate ourselves into one national community.