



# THE CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

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### CHAPTER ONE

# THE MUSLIM FILIPINO GROUPS

A CERTAIN TYPE of social reform movement appears again and again in the history of Muslim peoples throughout the world. These movements have been characterized by at least three common signs: an increased awareness of Islam—a reawakening—among the Muslims; their commitment to reshape the social, cultural, and political structures of their communities to reflect better the Islamic ideal; and their vigorous efforts to eliminate any forces—both internal and external—that have disrupted or threatened their society and the Islamic ideal. The fundamental purpose behind all these movements, then, has been to preserve the integrity of the *umma*, or Islamic community.

But each movement has been manifested in a different way; each has been determined by its own distinct historical, political, and geographical circumstances. To understand the current social movement among the Muslim Filipinos—in which they are seeking autonomy, self-definition as Muslims, and recognition throughout the country as a group of citizenry separate from but equal to other Filipinos—we must consider their Philippine as well as their Islamic heritage. We must know not only something about the ideology of Islam and its general religious and social precepts and institutions, but also something about the particular history of the Muslim Filipino groups and how it has interwoven with the national history of the Philippines, about ethnolinguistic similarities and differences among the groups, and about their social and cultural institutions. Further, we must know something about their relationship not only with Muslims elsewhere in the world but with the non-Muslim majority in their own country, who outnumber them by far.

What is often referred to broadly as the "Muslim movement in the Philippines" in truth comprises several movements. These various factions—including traditional Muslim leaders and old-style politicians, Muslim national associations, "moderates," the Moro National Liberation Front (the MNLF), and the separate factions even within it—differ from each other in leadership styles and strategies for achieving their goals. Some believe only in negotiating with the Philippine government; others believe that stronger pressure is needed. But their ultimate goals are very much alike.

In examining this current movement and the strife in which it has embroiled the Muslim Filipinos, we ought to ask what it is they truly want for themselves as Muslims rather than as Filipinos, as members of communities that are Muslim first rather than separate ethnolinguistic groups within a nation of Southeast Asia. Indeed, they ought to ask it of themselves and of each other: What do they want as Muslims? For ultimately, their common goals and aspirations, as determined by Islamic ideals, have shaped and will continue to shape their history—both their historic past and the history they are making now.

MUSLIMS CONSTITUTE THE second largest religious community in the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country. There were at least 3 million Muslim Filipinos in 1975, or 7 percent of the country's total population of 42,070,600. They can be classified according to the twelve ethno-linguistic groups listed in the table below. This table does not include data for the Badjao, or seafaring Samal, who are professed Muslims. Nor does it include Muslims among the Subanon in Zamboanga, the Bukidnon in Bukidnon, nor the 10 thousand Muslim converts in Manila and Luzon. And hundreds if not thousands of Maranao and other Muslims originally from Mindanao and Sulu have migrated to Manila and its environs.

### MUSLIM FILIPINO GROUPS

Group Name	Population
	(est. 1975)
Maguindanao	674,000
Maranao and Iranun	670,000
Tausug	492,000
Samal	202,000
Yakan	93,000
Jama Mapun	15,000
Palawan groups (Palawani and Molbog)	10,000
Kalagan	5,000
Kolibugan	4,000
Sangil	3,000
SOURCE: Data from Peter Gowing, Mush	im Filipinos—
Heritage and Horizon, 1979, p. 2.	-

The vast majority of Muslims, however, live in the Philippine South, that is, on the island of Mindanao and in the Sulu Archipelago. The Maguindanao, the largest group, are concentrated mostly in the Cotabato region of Mindanao. The Maranao live in the two Lanao provinces, mostly in the Lake Lanao region. Their close kin, the Iranun, or Illanun, inhabit the Lanao region around Illana Bay and the northern Cotabato region. The Tausug and Samal live in the Sulu Archipelago, whereas others of them have settled on Basilan Island and in Zamboanga del Sur. The Jama Mapun live on the island of Cagayan de Sulu; the Yakan, on Basilan. The Sangil live in Davao as well as on the Sarangani Islands and parts of Cotabato. The Kalagan live along the shores of the Davao Gulf. The Kolibugan are concentrated mostly in Zamboanga del Sur. The Palawani live in southern Palawan Island; the Molbog, or Melebuganon, on nearby Balabac Island, which is just off the northern coast of Borneo.

Many of the Muslim dialects share similarities: both the Maguindanao and Maranao languages, for example, can be spoken and understood by both groups. But some languages and dialects spoken by Muslims are more akin to Christian ones: the closely related Samal, Jama Mapun, and Badjao are yet quite different from Tausug, which resembles the Tagalog and Visayan spoken mostly by Christians. Nonetheless, the various languages and dialects of Christian and Muslim Filipinos are all derived from the same linguistic family, according to modern linguists, and share many similarities. After all, both Muslim and Christian Filipinos belong to the Malay race.

The Muslim groups also differ in their occupations. The Maguindanao are an agricultural people who cultivate wet rice. The Maranao cultivate upland rice and corn; they are also famous for their brasswork and weaving. Spirited traders, they can be found selling their wares almost anyplace in the Philippines. Most of the Iranun are farmers, but some are fishermen. Those Tausug who live inland on Jolo Island are farmers, whereas the coastal Tausug and Samal are fishermen and barter traders. The Yakan of Basilan Island cultivate upland rice and root crops but rarely fish, whereas the Samal living on the island's coast are fishermen. The Kalagan are both traders and fishermen. Tagalog Muslims, on the other hand, are highly urbanized: some are professionals, some office workers, some factory workers. Factory workers are rare, however, in the predominantly Muslim areas because there is little, if any, manufacturing or similar industry.

The Muslim groups differ markedly in the practice of their cultural traditions and customary laws (adat), some of which were established before the advent of Islam. In general, however, the groups share a similar social structure. Throughout their history, this social, as well as political, structure has been based on the datu system, which was also, like the adat, a pre-Islamic institution. The datu was a local or petty ruler, or princeling, with executive and military powers. One might inherit such status or acquire it through military prowess, wealth, or astuteness. With the advent of Islam, a few powerful datus eventually assumed the title of sultan; but there was always tension between sultans and less powerful datus. To solidify their power and establish their rule as ostensibly legitimate, sultans claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Today there are still datus among Muslim Filipinos, although many of their former powers have been diminished.

In past centuries, single Muslim groups constituted independent political units, or some combined to form political aggregations. Sometimes there was fighting, as well as economic rivalry, among them. But when in common danger from external threats, they usually cooperated in military defense. There was also frequent intermarriage between their ruling families, for economic and political purposes. Today, however, intermarriage between the groups is increasing among the other social classes as well because modern technology has made transportation and communication easier and has greatly reduced the relative isolation of the groups. Previously, Manila, as the educational center and capital of the country, was often the sole source of contact between members of the different groups.

There are also differences among the Muslim groups in their applied forms of Islamic practices and institutions. Groups who were exposed to Islam earlier in history tend to believe that their forms of practice are thus more sophisticated or more orthodox than those of other groups. Perhaps as a reflection of this, adherence to traditional practices and rituals of Islam is more evident in the larger towns than in the rural areas. And as a result of the earlier Islamic influence on the groups that settled near large population centers, their established *adat* changed sooner, becoming less pervasive in their daily lives, whereas the *adat* of more rural

groups were preserved longer: the degree of influence of the adat varies among the groups even today.

But, regardless of their differences, Muslims in the Philippines all consider themselves Muslims and identify with each other. They are constantly aware that their religion is distinct from the religions of other Filipinos. They are not fazed by remarks some foreign Muslim visitors make that particular practices among them are not truly Islamic. Nonetheless, their religious leaders—especially those who have studied abroad in Arab countries—continually instruct the faithful to adhere to other practices that these leaders have learned as more orthodox or truer to Islam.

All Muslim Filipinos recognize each other as members of a wider religious community that transcends linguistic, racial, tribal, and national boundaries. They all pray together, within or outside their communities. Regardless of the degree of their participation in national or civic affairs, or in other institutions and associations, the major source of their identity is Islam. It is an identity that has been shaped by historical forces of the last four or five centuries and that has been endangered but reinforced by the dramatic events, the tragic turmoil and fighting, of the last two or three decades.



### CHAPTER TWO

# WESTERN IMPERIALISM

THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION of the Philippines caused it to be drawn gradually into the international maritime trade that extended from the Red Sea to the China Sea. From the ninth century C.E. to the early sixteenth century, this trade was controlled almost wholly by Muslim merchants. Muslim traders are known to have visited Borneo in the tenth century, and some settled in Sulu as early as the thirteenth century. By this time, Muslim traders were often stopping at islands in the Philippines on their way north to China. In the next century, Muslim preachers (makhdumin) from nearby Indonesian islands arrived in Sulu on a missionary endeavor. These makhdumin, some undoubtedly influenced

by Sufism, taught the basic elements of Islam and erected simple mosques.

In the last decade of the fourteenth century, when the vestiges of the Kingdom of Srivijaya were being swept away by Majapahit, there was an exodus of many Sumatran princes and warriors to different parts of the Malay world. Sulu tarsilas (Ar. silsila)1 tell of a Sumatran prince with ministers and followers who landed at Buansa on Iolo Island to found a principality. They were confronted by native Muslims, and fighting broke out. The accounts are vague about a probable victory for the baguinda: they tell only that the local chiefs welcomed him when he identified himself and his followers as Muslims. The baguinda became a local raigh and married a native Muslim lady. According to Sulu legend, years later an Arab journeyed from Sumatra and Borneo to Buansa. He married a daughter of the baguinda and established a sultanate in about 1450, according to historians. All Sulu sultans have claimed descent from this first sultan.

When Malacca was at the height of its glory and had even become an Islamic theological center, many of its Muslim preachers migrated to other Malay lands to spread the faith. In 1511, however, this fabled Muslim international emporium fell to the Portuguese. Members of its royal family fled to other areas as refugees. Some founded new principalities, probably including a principality along the western shore of Mindanao. Its founders and their successors began to extend their power southward to what is now the province of Cotabato.

The fall of Malacca set the stage for Brunei to emerge as a leading Malay naval and commercial power. By the 1520s, an increasing number of Muslim Bornean traders and preachers were arriving in the Philippines. Also by this time, Manila had become a Muslim principality under a datu, or rajah, who was a kinsman of the Brunei sultan.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Tarsilas: written genealogical accounts. Some include mythological elements, whereas others refer to authentic historical incidents. They normally deal with early settlers, movements of populations, sultans, and religious personalities.

THE COMING OF the Spaniards to the Philippines in 1565 to establish a colony and to convert its inhabitants to Christianity is important in that it blocked any further spreading of Islam north from Borneo and the southern Philippines toward Luzon and the Visayan Islands. From then on, Islam would be confined to the Sulu Archipelago and western Mindanao.

By force, persuasion, or inducing submission with gifts, the Spaniards were able to extend their sovereignty throughout the widely scattered Philippine settlements (barangays). But they met with fierce resistance from at least three sultanates in the South—those of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Buayan —which were political entities that had developed far beyond the simple structure of the barangay. The Spaniards spared no efforts in men and resources to colonize and to convert the Muslims; their hatred for Islam and its institutions intensified with every failed effort. The Spaniards compelled natives, whom they had converted, to serve as their allies in combat: these natives served as rowers, spearmen, or warriors in attacks against Muslim settlements and forts. They were indoctrinated with the belief that they were performing a religious service. The Christian indio, then, was pitted against the recalcitrant moro.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Crusades of medieval Europe were extended to Malay lands.

The long series of wars between the Spaniards and the Muslims have been called the "Moro Wars," and they continued up to the twilight of Spanish rule in the Philippines. Their effects cannot be overemphasized: they contributed to the tensions and conflicts that exist today between Chris-

<sup>2</sup>Moro: When the Spaniards came to the Philippines in the second half of the sixteenth century, they used the term moro to refer to inhabitants professing Islam. Indio gradually came to denote natives who became Christians. Unconverted pagans in the mountains or interior of large islands were called infieles. By the seventeenth century, these terms were rarely confused in Spanish accounts. The term Filipino was, almost up to the last years of the Spanish colonial regime, normally reserved for Spaniards born in the Philippines to distinguish them from the peninsulares, who were Spaniards born in Spain.