



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEGENERATION OF RURAL  
MAGUINDANAONS: CONTRIBUTIONS OF COLONIALISM AND  
POLITICAL INSTABILITY**

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEGENERATION OF RURAL MAGUINDANAONS:  
CONTRIBUTIONS OF COLONIALISM AND  
POLITICAL INSTABILITY

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Science  
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The Maguindanaon society in the Philippines, the largest group of Muslims in the country, is beset by numerous socio-economic problems challenging the best powers of national leaders and development planners.

In this following work the author have tried to describe the present socio-economic conditions of Maguindanaon villagers and explain how their situation came into being. She viewed the problem as a part of the legacies of Western colonialism in Moroland and the violence and exploitation it brought.

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An abstract of the thesis presented to the Senate  
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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEGENERATION OF RURAL MAGUINDANAONS:  
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by

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June 1988

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The long and complex history of interactions between the Muslims and the Spanish and American colonialists in the Philippines have resulted in marked changes in the political, economic and social life of the Maguindanaon Muslims which have persisted to the present time. The situation of the tribe became worsened when they were forcibly incorporated into the Philippine State controlled by politically and socio-culturally different northern Filipinos. This act only deepened the centuries of enmity between these two groups of Filipinos which



culminated in the Mindanao civil war in the 1970's. This phenomenon of violence has also helped shaped the present structure of Maguindanaon society.

In this thesis, the writer attempted to discuss the effects of colonialism and one of its product, the Mindanao civil war on the socio-economic life of the Muslim villagers, particularly the Maguindanaons. Their socio-economic conditions which is also used interchangeably with level of living, was appraised on the basis of their level of education, type of occupation, farm size, household income, household possessions and type of housing.

The study was conducted to 128 randomly sampled respondents from one of the Maguindanaon villages in Cotabato, Southern Philippines. The data used in the discussion was gathered by means of the survey method, personal interviews with knowledgeable informants, personal observations and by consulting previous studies on the Philippines, Mindanao and the Moros.

Results of the study showed that the socio-economic conditions of the rural Maguindanaons was very deplorable. As a result of their turbulent colonial experience and the political instability in the south, several problems cropped up



among the group. These include high illiteracy rate in terms of formal education, landlessness, unemployment, insufficiency of income, limited material possessions and poor type of housing.

This thesis therefore concludes that the present structure of the Maguindanaon society and the socio-economic problems they faced are shaped not only by the events and happenings of the present but also those of the days gone by.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat  
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sebahagian daripada syarat-syarat  
Ijazah Sarjana Sains

KEMUNDURAN SOSIO-EKONOMI SUKU KAUM MAGUINDANAO:  
SUMBANGAN PENJAJAHAN DAN KETIDAKSTABILAN POLITIK

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Salingtindak di antara orang-orang Islam dan Penjajah Sepanyol dan Amerika di Filipina mempunyai sejarah yang panjang dan kompleks. Ini telah menghasilkan perubahan yang nyata sekali dalam kehidupan politik, ekonomi dan sosial bagi orang-orang Islam Maguindanao yang masih kekal hingga kini. Keadaan suku kaum ini menjadi lebih teruk apabila mereka dipaksa bergabung ke dalam negara Filipina yang dikuasai oleh orang-orang Filipina utara yang berbeza dari segi latarbelakang politik dan sosio-budayanya. Tindakan ini hanya menambahkan lagi rasa permusuhan yang memang telah wujud berabad-abad



lamanya, dan keadaan ini telah mencetuskan Perang Saudara Mindanao dalam tahun 1970 an.

Fenomena keganasan ini telah juga membantu dalam pembentukan struktur masyarakat suku Maguindanao yang ada kini.

Dalam tesis ini penulis cuba membincangkan kesan-kesan penjajahan dan Perang Saudara Mindanao sebagai salah satu dari akibatnya ke atas kehidupan sosio-ekonomi orang-orang Islam yang tinggal di kampung terutamanya bagi suku Maguindanao. Keadaan sosio-ekonomi mereka yang juga kadangkala disebut sebagai tahap kehidupan telah diukur berdasarkan tahap pendidikan, jenis pekerjaan, keluasan kebun ladang, pendapatan isirumah, hakmilik isirumah dan jenis perumahan mereka.

Kajian ini telah dijalankan ke atas 128 responden yang telah dipilih secara rawak dari salah satu kampung Maguindanao di Cotabato, Filipina Selatan. Data-data yang digunakan dalam perbincangan telah dikumpulkan dengan cara tinjauan temubual dengan orang-orang yang berpengetahuan, pemerhatian dan melalui kajian-kajian lepas ke atas Filipina, Mindanao dan kaum Moro.

Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa keadaan sosio-ekonomi bagi suku Maguindanao pendalaman sangat menyedihkan. Hasil daripada pengalaman penjajahan dan ketidakstabilan politik di

Selatan, berbagai masalah telah timbul di kalangan kumpulan ini. Ini termasuklah kadar buta huruf yang tinggi dalam bentuk pendidikan formal, ketidakcukupan pendapatan, hakmilik yang terhad dan keadaan perumahan yang tidak memuaskan.

Dari itu tesis ini merumuskan bahawa struktur masyarakat Maguindanao yang ada kini dan masalah-masalah sosio-ekonomi yang dihadapi tidak hanya dibentuk oleh kejadian-kejadian masakini tetapi juga telah dibentuk oleh kejadian-kejadian masa lepas.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Moroland, as the beleaguered Southern Philippines is sometimes called has acquired an unpopular label owing to the long drawn-out civil disturbance which has obviously become the major headache of the Philippine Government in recent years. Regarded as home by some five million Muslims (Zainon, 1986:10), the provinces comprising it, Lanao, Cotabato, Zamboanga and Sulu (Magdalena, 1979:243) have been plagued by violence popularly and variously referred to as the Muslim-Christian Civil War, Muslim War for Independence or Moro War for Liberation (Gomez, 1977:11).

This civil war between the Christians and Muslims in Mindanao started as localized "wars", or even small encounters between armed Muslims and Christian groups in the Mindanao region of Cotabato in 1970. Its causes are varied and complex. Firstly, there is the long history of warfare between the Muslims and the Christians in the Philippines. This started when the Spaniards succeeded in christianizing the inhabitants of Luzon and Visayas and used these people to fight against the Moros. The violence that exploded in 1970



and the civil war that followed is certainly a product of this long history of hostility (Ibid., p. 177) perpetuated under the more than three hundred years of Spanish and a half century of American colonization and subjugation. In fact, Muslim history in the Philippines has been described by a prominent Muslim historian as "wars" against the Spaniards, Americans and now Christian Filipinos (Ibid., p. 177).

Secondly, there is the contest for land between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao. This was the result of the American policy of resettling Christians from Luzon and Visayas in Mindanao, a policy that was continued by the Commonwealth and the present Republic. This increased the intensity of hate between these two warring groups. The situation was compounded by the coming of the big capitalists from Manila and Cebu along with the American and Japanese Multinational Corporations who began to exploit Mindanao further.

Thirdly, there is the religious factor. The resurgence of Islam after World War II has infused new dynamism into the religious life of the Muslims. This in turn, led them to see their distinctiveness vis-a-vis the Christian Filipinos (Gomez, 1977:231). That is why many of them are not happy with the integration efforts of the government because they suspect that this would only lead them to be assimilated into the cultural milieu of the Christian majority. To them, religion is life



and their socio-cultural milieu is Islamic. To be molded, therefore, into a model that does not respect nor consider their sensibilities is nothing short of socio-cultural suicide (Ibid., p. 173).

Fourthly, there is the political factor. As we shall see in the later discussions, the political ambition of both Muslim and Christian leaders to retain their dominance in their areas or in the Philippines as a whole, have contributed to Muslim-Christian hostilities. The creation of the "Blackshirts" and the "Barracudas" by the Muslim traditional leaders and the formation of the "Ilagas" by Christian mayors, politicians and businessmen have led to armed confrontation between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao.

The situation became critical when in March 1968, some 60 Muslim recruits allegedly being trained for guerilla warfare by the Philippine military on Corregidor for operations in the Malaysian state of Sabah were machine-gunned to death by government troops (Gomez, 1977:179; Tasker, 1977:18). They were reported executed for mutiny in protest, says one version, over not being paid for months, or says another version, over the prospect recently revealed to them of being sent into action against brother Muslims in Malaysia (Gowing, 1979:191-92).

The Corregidor incident enraged the Muslims who then in unison called for blood. This marked the beginning of a radical change in the relationship between the Muslims and Christians in Mindanao (Zainon, 1986:10). This soon led to the formation of the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) which was originally the idea of the former governor of Cotabato, Datu Udtog Matalam.

The so-called movement gave rise to apprehension and fear among the Christians. It was reported that in June 1968, they began to leave North Cotabato because of the fear of Muslim uprisings. But others who were already established on productive farms and businesses in Cotabato were not about to give up their gains without a fight (Gowing and McAmis, 1974:45). Thus, they formed their own armed groups referred to as the "Ilagas", facing them are the "Blackshirts" and "Barracudas", armed groups created by the Muslim traditional leaders. Hence the stage is set for an armed conflict.

On March 22, 1970, the shooting war in Mindanao began in Upi, North Cotabato which is part of the Maguindanao Province today. For months, a group of Tiruray tribesmen led by a Christian settler, Feliciano Luces, alias "Commander Toothpick" (a group which later on came to be known as the Ilagas) battled with Muslim groups such as the "Barracudas" and the "Blackshirts" and all carried out bloody raids on civilians



of the "opposing" religion (Tasker, 1977:18). Soon the shooting spread to other parts of Cotabato. By this time, it was no longer just Tiruray Ilagas but groups of Christian settlers taking the law into their own hands (Gowing, 1979:193). The paramilitary units of Christian mayors in Cotabato were often called Ilagas at that time (Gomez, 1973:164 in Gowing, 1979:193). In July 1971, the violence spread to the two Lanao provinces and by 1972, the conflict reached Zamboanga del Sur. Everywhere in Moroland the atmosphere was tense. Here and there small scale fighting occurred as the Ilagas and the Philippine Armed Forces squared off against the Blackshirts and the Barracudas (Gowing, 1979:194-95).

The armed-struggle of the Muslim Blackshirts and Barracudas was continued by the Moro National Liberation Front's (MNLF) Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) after the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines on September 21, 1972. The MNLF was a newly formed group whose members were said to have quietly been undergoing secessionist guerilla warfare training since 1968 or 1969. Soon after the declaration of Martial Law, it emerged as the strongest and best disciplined and coordinated of the dissident Moro groups (Gowing, 1979:197). Its goals and aspirations are understood by many to represent Muslim aspiration. In the words of Nur Misuari, chairman

