

## CHAPTER VI: MUSLIM COTABATO, SAMPLING OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TRAITS

### General Description

The Maguindanao and the Maranao share a common tradition from pagan times through Islamic times when Sarip Kabunsuan founded the first Islamic political dynasty in Mindanao, whose influence spread into the Maranao territory as a result of population movement and inter-marriages between the Maguindanao and the non-Maguindanao pagan ancestors of the Maranao. This explains the present close ethnic, cultural, and linguistic affinity between the two Muslim groups of Cotabato and Lanao.<sup>73</sup>

Cotabato is occupied by both Muslims and non-Muslims who interact in varied forms of social and cultural relationship. Although modern industries are currently changing the physical profile of the land, Cotabato is basically an agricultural region with vast fertile plains and valleys wider than the combined areas of some three or four provinces in Luzon. Many residents fondly call their province the "Texas of Mindanao," "Empire Province," and "Melting Pot of the Philippines" to describe the ethnic and geographical characteristics of the place.

Cotabato (both the province and the city) is the traditional home of the Maguindanao who once constituted a nation with great political and military powers. They had early contact with Chinese traders who were accepted into exogamous marriages. Until recently, the Maguindanao had the numerical superiority over other ethnic settlers. In the past few decades newcomers from densely-populated towns in Luzon, Visayas, and other Mindanao provinces were attracted to the vast unsettled land of the Empire Province, thereby reducing the Maguindanao to a minority.

While Cotabato City is the seat of the modern capital of the

provincial government, Nuling on the opposite bank of the Polangui River, is the seat of the traditional power of the Sultanate of Maguindanao with a theoretical jurisdiction over the land and its Muslim population, especially in the Lower Valley. The modern Municipality of Nuling has an area wider than the Province of Tarlac in Central Luzon.

**Ethnic Characteristics.** From the estimate of informants,<sup>74</sup> the Ilocanos constitute the largest number of settlers among the Luzon groups. Among the Visayans, the Cebuanos and Hilongos have considerable numbers. The former are corn cultivators on dry lands, while the latter are oriented to wet-land rice cultivation. Future studies might show that the Maranao (also called Iranon by the Maguindanao) have the largest number among non-Maguindanao Muslim settlers. They are mostly found on the northern and north-western borders of Cotabato, on the common boundaries between Lanao and Cotabato. The close ethno-linguistic affiliations between these Muslim peoples made them quite indistinguishable.

Because of its cosmopolitan character attracting outsiders, Cotabato City (which seems more affected by change than Marawi City) has larger non-Maguindanao than Maguindanao residents. However, despite the settlers' numerical advantage, the traditional social influence of the natives is highly respected by the settlers. A good number of Maguindanao are employed in both the Provincial and City Governments. The Provincial Governor and the City Mayor are both Maguindanao from the traditional ruling families. Next to the Maguindanao language, Tagalog is said to be more widely used than Cebuano by the townspeople in their business transactions.

A good number of Tau-Sug (Joloanos) and Samal residents are to be found settling in the fishing coastal towns of the province. The Indonesians who easily pass for Philippine Muslim settle in the southern portion of the land facing the Celebes Sea. Since there is no clear-cut physical difference among the ethnic groups, variations in language distinguish one from the other. In a long bus trip between Cotabato and Kabacan, one could hear Tagalog, Ilocano, Cebuano, Chabacano, and Leyte-Samar in addition to Maguindanao and Maranao. The last two languages share common root-words but the variations often occur in the use of affixes. Speakers of the two languages can communicate intelligently without the use of an interpreter.

The other Cultural Minorities of Cotabato are the Tagabilis, Tagacaolos, Bilaans, Manobos, Tirurays, Bagobos, Suroks, and Sangils.<sup>75</sup> The last are Muslims while the others belong to the so-called pagan groups.

The town of Parang is geographically, socially, and culturally a marginal area between Maguindanao and Maranao influences. Although it is also a native word for a farmer's trowel, the name Parang is really a corruption of the ancient name Padampadang. The social and cultural characteristics of the town bear evidence of the historical transition of Maguindanao into Maranao. The Iranon language of the latter is predominantly spoken by the townspeople with considerable admixture of Maguindanao.

**Changing Patterns.** The physical appearance of Cotabato reveals a changing pattern between the old and new ways of life. The marketplace in Cotabato City offers a contrasting scene of the old and new-style attires of the townspeople. The native headwear and the *malong* (sarong) are worn by the Maguindanao quite differently from the Maranao style. The wearing of native and western-style dress in combination presents tangible evidence of the widespread effect of acculturation. The physical look of the buildings in the city poblacion is a contrast to the traditional image of a Maguindanao village; the city is fast-changing like any growing Philippine town.

The portions of the province in the so-called Moro communities along the highway from Cotabato City to Kabacan look more like Central Luzon than Lanao with a blending of Maranao and Arab in the mosque architectures. The "new look" of Cotabato is evidence of a relatively fast cultural and technological change as a result of a high degree of contact between natives and settlers.

**Business and Industrial Activities.** It is apparent that the Chinese and the Christian immigrants hold the upper hand within the commercial center of Cotabato City. In the transportation business, Maguindanao operators tried to compete but failed to gain success. This is a contrast to the situation in Marawi city where the Maranao dislodged the settlers from the control of milling, retailing, transportation, real estate, and other enterprises. As a matter of fact, Maranao traders frequently join the competition in the marketplaces in Cotabato as they do in other Philippine towns. However, the Maguindanao are reputedly better farmers and many of their leading families of *datus* reportedly have large land-holdings.

The scene at the poblacion of Cotabato City features a good number of Muslim women who overtly indicate their secularization from the tradition of the Moro home where isolation seems a virtue. Many of these womenfolk sell inside shops and in the marketplace in the town center. This, too, is a contrast to the situation in Lanao where the women of the datu class refrain from being seen selling inside shops or marketplaces. Adjustment to new business and industrial activities among the Maguindanao is an indication of the fast-changing patterns of life or the acceptance of the new traits currently affecting many of the old traditions.

**Muslim Communities.** There are 20 municipalities in Cotabato. The province has no municipal districts as there are in Lanao. A number of towns have fairly mixed population of Maguindanao and non-Maguindanao residents. The majority of new towns are predominantly populated by the Christian settlers. At a Barrio Council Institute organized in Midsayap by the PACD, the barrio officials in attendance were all non-Maguindanao representatives. In view of the multilingual needs of the whole group of trainees, the group discussions had to be divided into sub-groups of Ilocano-speaking, Cebuano-speaking, and Hilongo-speaking officials in order to facilitate effective communication of ideas.

Out of the 20 municipalities, about eight were listed by the informants as "Muslim communities" because of their Muslim majority populations. These are the municipalities of Nuling, Datu Piang (formerly Dulawan), Dinaig, Pagalongan, Buluan, Parang, Pikit, and Insolan. These municipalities have Muslim mayors coming from the datu class families of strong traditional influence<sup>76</sup> Like Lanao, these communities have mosques as physical symbols of their Islamic social and religious life. The mosque in Pagalongan, a town having an Arabic madrasa school, wears the architectural style of a Christian church and is distinguished at a distance as a Muslim place of worship only by the crescent symbol atop the minarets and domes. The building makes a humorous contrast with a Protestant chapel in Marawi city featuring a "double-tier" roofing atop the main conventional Christian-church structure.

The establishment of municipal governments in the traditional Muslim settlements bring into contact the institutions of the *constitutional* and the *traditional* types of administration in the social and political structures of the Muslim communities. Barrio government

is gaining acceptance in these Muslim territories, but its effectivity is said to be "slow." Community Development organizers of barrio projects reported their difficulty of involving the active participation of Muslim communities into barrio organizations. This impediment could be attributed to the rivaling influences between the traditional structure maintaining its strength in the smaller grassroot unit of society and the modern barrio organization that has started to assume influence. There is, therefore, a need to look into the actual situations of conflict for the discovery of a better order of cooperation.

**Nuling: A Maguindanao Community.** The traditional order of Maguindanao social and political life has been reported in Chapter II of this report. The two most important sultanates in the present-day area of Cotabato are those of Maguindanao and Buayan which derived their ancient authorities from a common ancestor of one ruling house. The other sultanates are those of Kabuntalan, Bagumbayan, Kudarangan, and other less-known ones. The once most powerful Sultanate of Maguindanao had a theoretical jurisdiction over the southern half of Mindanao comprising the modern areas of Cotabato, Davao, and in the north on the coastal regions of Lanao and Zamboanga del Sur bordering the Moro Gulf where the Sultan held control over both Muslim and pagan subjects. The reigning sultan has his residence in Zamboanga del Sur where he is reportedly highly respected by his constituents who support him with the customary tribute (*buis*). He comes home occasionally to Nuling for ceremonial purposes.

Nuling is the traditional seat of power of the Sultanate of Maguindanao. Its modern municipal government territory extends over the north bank of Polangui River opposite Cotabato City, the provincial capital. The incumbent mayor claims to be an heir to the power of the sultanate and as a datu he commands influence over the subjects of the older system in addition to his authority as a municipal government executive. With this extant role of datu still respected, there is a clear evidence of two sets of allegiance of the people to the legal and traditional authorities in this community. Mayor Datu Sanggacala Baraguir had, at the time of this survey, a *domato* (subject or follower) under "arrest" according to traditional authority in view of his wife's complaint that he was living with another woman

without the wife's consent to a "legal" bigamous marriage. This is a sample case submitted to *agama* settlement instead of the municipal court.

**Socio-Political Structure.** Despite the reduction of its ancient influence, the traditional institution of Nuling, as assumed by the Sultanate of Maguindanao which traces its origin from Sarip Kabunsuan, had spread its system to all other socio-political organizations in Cotabato and Lanao. This is written in the *salsilas* of the Muslim people in both provinces.

The Maguindanao inhabitants of Nuling divide themselves into three classes: (1) the *datu class*, (2) the *domato class*, (3) the *bisaya class*. The datu class is the society of blood-related persons assuming the aristocratic role of heirs to the sultanate throne of Maguindanao who could display traditional titles such as those of the Sultan, *radiamoda*, *watamama*, *bayi* (for female), and a number of formal titles, but not as varied as those found among the Maranao.

The name *domato* or *ndatuan* literally means, "followers or subjects" of the Sultan who hails from the datu class. They constitute the greater bulk of the populace. The slave class is called *bisaya* which, in contrast to the first two classes as in Lanao, does not represent an organized society. Persons of this category are attached to the family of the datus who consider them as "property." It is also evident that pagan tribes who owe allegiances and pay tribute to the Sultan are his subjects.

Besides the temporal leaders, the Maguindanao have religious leaders including the *imam*, *katib*, *kali*, *bilal* and other Arab titles of spiritual officers. There are also the class of *sheiks*, *hadjis* who have made pilgrimage to Mecca to gain prestige and honor. The *olama* and the *tuan*, who are the religious scholars and practitioners, respectively, are the same as those in Lanao.

**Organized Activities.** Formerly life in Nuling was characterized by widespread cooperation in agriculture, trading, fishing, and military defense under the Sultan's supreme rule. Today, to a lesser degree, the datus and followers are still drawn together by customary events such as those related to wedding celebrations, funerals, religious affairs, enthronement of dignitaries, and others of social, economic, and recreational natures. The construction and repair of the community mosques is still a customary collective activity of the people under the leadership of the datus.

The "datu-mayor" of Nuling reported an example of the unity of social action among his people in the construction of a barrio road which was a result of his dual influence as a traditional leader and as a government officer.

### Conclusion

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The patterns of social, political, and religious life of both the Maguindanao and Maranao belong to the genuine Mindanao "Moro-Muslim" cultural matrix. The variation in social practices seems insignificant as uniformities prevail most over the fewer differences. Old and new traditions meet in both Muslim communities of Cotabato and Lanao. Situations of conflict and cooperation are discernible for social planners to consider in the structuring of changing community life.