

Mindanao.⁴¹

Islam was first introduced in Mindanao in 1460 and became the basis for the development of principalities and sultanates in the area. These sultanates traded with Southeast Asia, India, Japan and China, and established diplomatic relations with Spain, France, the Netherlands and Britain.

In the 16th century, Spain attempted to colonize the Muslims through the sword and the cross. Spain had earlier developed deep anti-Muslim sentiments due to their struggle for independence from the Moorish rules of the Iberian peninsula. The Muslims fought the Spanish attempts to colonize them for over three centuries. Yet, despite Spain's failure to colonize Mindanao, it included Mindanao in the territories ceded to the United States under the 1898 Treaty of Paris. The American pacification campaign succeeded in dividing the Moros and neutralizing their resistance.

After 1946, the Philippine Government, under Filipino leadership, continued these colonial policies and programs. While the Moros claimed Mindanao as their historic homeland, Christian settlers from Visayas and Luzon viewed Mindanao as a "land of promise."⁴² By 1970, after decades of internal and external migration, the Christian population outnumbered the non-Christian population by approximately 75 %.⁴³

These colonialism and their concomitant demographic consequences also resulted in the inequitable distribution of resources. The gross socio-economic imbalance between Muslims and Christians was most evident in the distribution of land, where the state policies and modern laws enacted by the colonial rule favoured the Christian settlers.

Further prejudices and misperceptions have added to the complexity to the fundamental issues involved in the Mindanao conflict. In particular, these include the lands taken by Christian settlers from the Muslims, "the marginalization of the Moro masses, and the increasing pauperization of the Christianized inhabitants."⁴⁴ The sporadic armed clashes between Christians and Muslims in the 70s were aggravated by various myths which claimed that the Moros are the "cause of the Christian woes by their refusal to abandon their old ways", and conversely, that the Christians were the "culprits in the suffering of the Moro masses."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Speech of Misuari, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Eliseo Mercado, "Culture, Economics and Revolt in Mindanao: The origins of the MNLF and the Politics of Moro Separatism", in Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S. (eds.), *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1984), p. 162.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.