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**The First Islamization of the Philippines
(From the 13th Century up to the 19th Century)
by Fr. Paolo Nicelli, P.I.M.E.**

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uneasy relationship with Christianity? *The Anthropology of Christianity* serves to encourage anthropologists to consider ethnography as a vehicle toward re-considering the often taken-for-granted concepts of the discipline, rather than merely as a presentation of empirical data. If, as Cannell has shown, such metatheoretical insight can be made through the study of Filipino Christian life worlds, we should feel compelled to interrogate the conditions by which anthropology in the Philippines has been conceptualized and deployed.

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FR. PAOLO NICELLI, P.I.M.E.

The First Islamization of the Philippines (From the 13th Century up to the 19th Century)

Zamboanga City: Silsilah Publications, 2003. 162 pages.

Many writings on the history of Muslim Mindanao hinge on the notion that centuries of enmity between Christians and Muslims shape their current relations. This book is no exception. Fr. Nicelli's account briefly reiterates the three most popular accounts on the early methods of propagating Islam in the Philippines, namely: through Muslim traders in the course of peaceful trade; through missionaries who traveled with traders from Arabia and India; and through the waging of war against non-Muslims. He discusses the third method in the context of the confrontation between Southeast Asian Muslim polities and Christian colonial powers. In the concluding paragraphs of the book, the author affirms that a "spirit of holy war" and the feeling of "anti-crusade" have led Muslims in both the past and the present "to defend Islam bravely and stubbornly from the aggressors, and to create a sense of unity among all the Muslim groups" (138).

In both the line of argumentation and data used, the book borrows, perhaps too excessively, from only a handful of authors, most notably Cesar Majul. Majority of the sections summarize data from Majul's *Muslims in the Philippines*, while other sections primarily cite Hilarion Gomez's work on Muslim-Christian relations, and Peter Gowing's work on Muslim Filipinos. Those in search of detailed explanations would be better off consulting the

works cited, for the ambitious six-century scope of the study was crammed into a short volume, leading to a rather superficial treatment of what are otherwise rich and charged topics.

It is unfortunate that precious space that could have been devoted to deepening the discussion was instead given to peripheral information. The first chapter, for instance, introduces the geographic and economic features of the Philippines, by enumerating details such as mountain ranges, livestock, crops for export, and the like, taken from sources like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *CIA Factbook*. The chapter also includes a list of unproblematicized “Common Traits of the Filipino People,” which essentializes Filipinos as having traits like “hospitality” and “loyalty,” as well as “fatalism” and “lack of initiative.” No effort was made to relate this background information contained in the book’s first eighteen pages to the main chapter on the “First Islamization of the Philippines,” presented quite late in the second half of the book in a flimsy nineteen-page chapter. With the book titled as such, one would expect the bulk of the discussion to deal with the history and process of Islamization, but the organization of the book does not sustain a well-defined focus.

Beyond problems of organization, the book’s overreliance on Majul seems to have resulted in the exclusion of alternative perspectives. The “spirit of holy war” and “anti-crusade” that flow through the author’s narrative are premised on a view advanced in Majul’s “Moro-Wars” approach—that of a united “Moro” effort to resist Western colonial incursions into Muslim territory. This view is indeed popular, even dominant, but it is by no means the only perspective available. A number of scholars have produced nuanced accounts that probe into local notions of power and the complex nature of alliances that go beyond a simplistic “Christians-versus-Muslims” framework. Perhaps the author could have taken into account an examination of the “Myth of Morohood” in Thomas McKenna’s *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, a book which appears in the bibliography but which does not figure in the narrative. The attempt to situate the Philippines within the historical context of Southeast Asia’s encounter with colonial powers likewise could have been enriched by two excellent works on the topic, namely, Patricio Abinales’s *Making Mindanao* and Reynaldo Ileto’s *Maguindanao 1860–1888*, which are sadly missing in his bibliography.

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