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Evelyn Tan-Cullamar



The term "diaspora" is usually associated with the dispersion of the Jews as a consequence of their defeat and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. In the last few years, however, a new field of study in international politics has engaged the attention of scholars, especially those from the United States and Israel. This is the study of networks created by ethnic groups which transcend the territorial state. These scholars have coopted the term "diaspora" to mean "a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin" (Esman in Sheffer 1986, 333). Once the links are severed by total assimilation into the host country, the diaspora community ceases to exist.

Migrations spawn diasporas. Migrations of people have been going on since early times. These movements of people led to the settlement of Europe. They also included the rise of overseas migrations which followed the voyages of exploration and discovery. In 1882, the climax was reached in the trans-continental migrations from Northern and Southern Europe to the United States of America (Taft and Robbins 1955, 374). But instead of petering out, international migrations in the 1980s have "surged to historically high levels and taken on new patterns that social scientists and policymakers are just beginning to understand" (Kritz in Fawcett and Cariño 1987, 29-30). Whereas in the intercontinental migration era the movement was generally from developed lands to newly emergent countries for permanent settlement, today international migrations embrace a wide range of movements, including those of labor migrants from developing to developed countries where they are considered "guest workers" and are expected to return to their homelands international refugees and other categories. With growing global interdependence, this phenomenon will continue and not diminish in importance. New diasporas are being formed as migratory movements accelerate, especially to the Middle East, Europe and North America.

Migrations may be compulsory or forced, as in the case of the African slaves to the New World. It can also be free or voluntary, as shown in the movement of many Europeans to the United States (Taft and Robbins 1955, 374). Some of the diaspora communities are quite old (Indian and Chinese). Others are of relatively recent vintage (Poles and Irish in the United States). Some are just emerging (Turks in West Germany and Palestinians in the Persian Gulf area) (Sheffer 1986, 12–13). Some diasporas exert strong influence on the decisions and policies of both host country and homeland (Jews in the United States) while others are without much clout (incipient labor diasporas in the Middle East).

Diasporas may be proletarian or mobilized. The former "have no economic resources other than their labor, few communication skills and limited organizational experience . . . They are relegated to the bottom of the income, occupational and status hierarchies (Esman in Sheffer 1986, 336). On the other hand, the mobilized diasporas are "those which bring occupational and communication skills that are in short supply in their adopted country (Esman in Sheffer 1986, 333). Chinese in Southeast Asia exemplify the latter type. However, it is possible for a proletarian diaspora to eventually develop into a mobilized one.

All of this shows the diversity and complexity of international migrations and the diasporas created. It is time that the many tangled threads are unravelled to understand better this phenomenon in the international scene today. This article focuses on a particular modern diaspora—that of the Indonesians in the Southern Philippines. The major problem addressed is this: What is the nature of the Indonesian diaspora and how does it affect Philippine-Indonesian relations? Diaspora politics involve a triadic network. In this case, the actors are the homeland (Indonesia), the host country (Philippines), and the diaspora community (Indonesians in Southern Philippines).

Indonesia is the Philippines' biggest and closest neighbor. The two countries have many things in common: climate, geography, race, language and culture. Both are founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). However, studies on the bilateral relations of these two countries are few.¹ No work so far has been undertaken on the Indonesian diaspora in Southern Philippines.

No general theory on international migration has been posited so far, probably because of the diverse types of population movements

and differences in their nature and development. As Portes points out, "international migration is not a homogeneous process (Portes in Fawcett and Cariño, 53). The "push-pull" theories to explain the causes of migration, the orthodox economic theories which emphasize the gap in wage incentive between the sending and receiving countries, and even the alternative economic theory based on deliberate labor recruitment by labor-scarce countries are considered inadequate in unravelling this complex phenomenon. For example, these theories cannot satisfactorily explain why some countries and regions experience these migrations while others in similar circumstances have failed to produce them. The attraction or "pull" of higher wages or better economic opportunities has not always drawn migrants from poor and less developed countries. A multifactor or multidimensional approach is used here to explore and explain the complex interplay of family and social networks, political, economic, geographic, historical and cultural factors in the migration flow.

This article is an exploration of a heretofore *terra incognita* in Philippine studies and does not purport to be definitive and comprehensive. It intends to break ground and blaze the trail for other interested scholars to follow. There is a need to confront the issue of an alien enclave at the Philippines' southern backdoor. They have been there since the early 1900s and their presence has implications for the bilateral relations of the homeland and the host country.

The Indonesian Diaspora

In the early 1900s, Mindanao seemed a haven which offered a fresh start for some islanders from the nearby Dutch East Indies, especially from the Sangir-Talaud area of northeastern Sulawesi. On their *bote*, *banca* or *prau*,² they island-hopped to the two southernmost islands of the Philippines, Balut and Sarangani. There was not much problem adjusting to this "new world" because it was similar to the one they had left behind. This new land was still part and parcel of the Malay island world that they and their forefathers knew and were familiar with. The Dutch presence and rule in their homeland, overpopulation, scarce resources and other economic hardships conspired to "push" the Indonesians to Southern Philippines. Family and social networks, perceived improved economic opportunities, geographical proximity, similar climate, and environment, historical links, sociocultural ties and a sense of adventure all played a part to "pull" them to the Philippines.

It is difficult to ascertain when the first Indonesian settler(s) set foot in the Philippines. According to some Indonesians interviewed, it is probable that Macaampo was the first to arrive, possibly a generation or two ahead of those who migrated in 1918 like Herman Mahaling, Jonathan Pareda and Dodorang Yanis.³ The usual *modus operandi* was for the males to move out first. Once they had established themselves in the new land, their families, relatives, friends or island-mates joined them. A chain migration that was largely kinship-based ensued. Thus in the sitio of Pakeluasu in Balut, most of the residents are from Kawaluso in the Sangir archipelago. Many are related, and surnames such as Subu, Taguriri, Sarageti and Sasamo are common. In sitio Sarangani, on the other hand, the settlers are mostly from Marore. Of the 8,000 to 10,000 Indonesians in Southern Philippines,⁴ many are illegal entrants, especially those who entered the country after 1946. But as pointed out by Ramos, et al., "both governments will have to understand that crossing the common boundary was not a crime until after each country attained political freedom and independence when the political lines were drawn across the Celebes Sea and adjoining maritime regions (Ramos et al. 1969, 126).

Most of these Indonesians are Protestant Christians, a majority of whom belong to the Indonesian Christian Congregation or ICC. They are affiliated with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). Only about 15 percent of the Indonesians are Muslims (interview with Rev. Agustinus Tiwa, Indonesian Protestant missionary of the ICC Church General Santos City, 21 April 1986). Most of them are engaged in farming, while others are occupied in fishing and trading. They speak their Sangir dialect among themselves, but they are also fluent in Cebuano, the language spoken in the region. Many cannot speak Bahasa Indonesia since a large number of them are Philippine-born. The majority have studied up to the primary level only.

The Indonesian migration continues to this day. Most of them are at present residing in the provinces of South Cotabato and Davao del Sur. A few can be found in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga, Cotabato City, Davao Oriental, Samal Island in Davao Province, and Davao City, where the Indonesian Consulate General is located. There have been return migrations to the homeland through the years. These were either forced or voluntary. An example of the first kind was the repatriation provided for in the 1956 agreement between the Philippines and Indonesia on immigration and illegal

entry. The return to Indonesia of many members of the Laker ICC Church was voluntary. This church used to have the largest membership, but now it has the smallest congregation among the ICC churches in Southern Mindanao (interview with Rev. Jolnius Mai, the other Indonesian missionary, based in Laker, Sarangani, 5 January 1989). Some of the reasons cited for this return migration are the facts that jobs are hard to come by or not available, there are many economic difficulties and hardships and a deteriorating peace and order situation in the Philippines, and the *transmigrasi* policy of Indonesia.⁵ But those who chose to remain say they will stay permanently unless they are forced to move out of the Philippines.

These Philippine Indonesians belong to a diaspora community because they form a minority ethnic group which migrated from Indonesia to the Philippines, but they still maintain sentimental and material links with their homeland. Many left relatives behind whom they visit sometimes. Some have children studying or working in Indonesia. Others have children who married Indonesians and are residing in Indonesia now. Still others go to Indonesia every now and then for limited trading. More importantly, they are Indonesian citizens.

The Indonesian diaspora is relatively young, since the earliest to come, as far as can be determined, established themselves in Balut and Sarangani islands in the early 1900s. Since most of them were unskilled and uneducated, the diaspora created was a proletarian one.

Philippine-Indonesian Relations

Indonesia became independent in 1949, three years after the Third Philippine Republic was born. The Philippines was one of the first to recognize the new Indonesian state, and diplomatic relations between the two countries began in the same year. The Indonesian Consulate General established in Manila became an embassy in 1950. A Philippine Consulate General was also set up in Jakarta in 1949 and became an embassy in 1951. Other consulates were opened in Menado, Surabaya and Balikpapan. Meanwhile, an Indonesia Consulate General was established in Davao City in 1953.

A Treaty of Friendship was signed in Jakarta in 1951 which provides that conflicts between the two countries are "to be resolved not by resorting to force but by diplomacy, mediation or arbitration"

(*Diplomatic Agenda of Philippine Presidents* 1985, 12–13). A landmark agreement was signed in 1956 on immigration and illegal entry to regulate the entry and exit of inhabitants of both countries. To encourage more exchanges in the cultural field, a Cultural Agreement was forged in 1959, the first cultural pact of the Philippines with any Asian nation. This was followed by the agreements on border crossing, border patrol, and border trade. Other arrangements were negotiated which covered scientific and technical cooperation, trade, joint coconut commission, fisheries, forestry, energy, sea communications, shipping and extradition (Yorac 1978, 92–114, 137–46, 340–48; *Folder*; Ramos et al. 1969, 156). All these diplomatic-legal agreements, along with the exchange of state visits of the leaders of both countries, laid the foundation for bilateral relations between the Philippines and Indonesia. Indonesian President Sukarno visited the Philippines in 1951 and Philippine President Quirino went to Indonesia the next year. Other Philippine presidents who went on state visits to Indonesia were Macapagal, Marcos and Aquino. President Suharto visited the Philippines in 1972, 1979 and in 1987 when he participated in the Third ASEAN Summit Meeting. Exchange of visits by high-ranking government officials and other important personages expanded contacts and promoted understanding between the two countries and their people.

Since it was the first country in Asia to gain freedom from its colonial master, the Philippines attracted the attention of other Asian nations still fighting for independence. But this admiration and goodwill was soon tarnished when other Asian countries realized that the ties which bound the Philippines to the United States were as strong as ever. The pro-US stance was thus looked upon with suspicion by the Philippines' Asian neighbors, including Indonesia. There was also a "parting of the ways" when the Philippines became a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) formed in 1954, one of only two nations in the region to do so. The other country was Thailand. Indonesia refused to join this Manila Pact because it "ran contrary to her independent and active foreign policy . . . Indonesia felt that the threat to Southeast Asia was not communism but still colonialism . . . " (Palacios 1988, 46). Neither did Indonesia join the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) formed in 1961 composed of Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Philippine participation in the historic Afro-Asian Conference in 1955 held at Bandung, Indonesia, showed to the other wary Asians

that, despite the pro-Western image of the Philippines, it was an Asian country which identified with Asia, and supported the Asians' common dreams and aspirations. Then President Macapagal spearheaded the creation of MAPHILINDO, made up of Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia, to bring together peoples of the Malay stock. In 1967, at Bangkok, Thailand, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations came into being, composed of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, to be joined in 1984 by Negara Brunei Darussalam. The ASEAN highlights sociocultural and economic cooperation and downplays the political and military aspects. Indonesia continues to distance herself from military blocs and alliances.

The presence of many Indonesians in Southern Philippines became a pressing issue in the 1950s. The rise of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) fueled the suspicion that the communists were infiltrating the Philippines through these Indonesians. This became a major problem of the Magsaysay administration. Negotiating panels met and deliberated on the issue and concluded the 1956 agreement which was ratified only in 1961. A border crossing card system for the nationals of each country was stipulated. An Indonesian resident of Sarangani who wants to visit his child studying in Marore, for example, applies for a border crossing card in Batuganding Station. His application form has to be accompanied by a certification of the mayor or the barangay captain that he had resided in Sarangani for at least three years and has no pending criminal case. A green card is then issued to him if his application is approved. A different green card is given to the crew of the watercraft which will take him to Marore.

For the Filipinos, a yellow card is issued. It is for a single entry and only 250 are to be released every quarter. It is valid for a thirty-day sojourn in Marore but only for fifteen days for the pump-boat's crew members. Nonresidents of the designated border crossing areas are not supposed to be given this privilege. For the Philippines, the border crossing areas are: Balut Island, Sarangani Island, Olanian Island, Cape San Agustin and the Tawi-Tawi Island Group. For Indonesia, the areas are the Nanusa Island Group, Kawio Island Group, Bukide Island Group and Tarakan. The Border Crossing Stations are manned by Philippine and Indonesian teams. There used to be three in the Philippines: Mabila in Balut, Cape San Agustin in Davao Oriental and Bongao in Tawi-Tawi. From Mabila, the station was moved to Batuganding also in Balut. At present it is the only

station that is truly operational (interview with David Henson, Coast Guard Station in Batuganding, Balut, 5 January 1989). There are also three designated stations in Indonesia: Marore, Miangas and Tarakan. Today, Marore is the only active station. The RP Border Committees were created to oversee the implementation of the agreements and to serve as consultative machinery. They are to identify problems resulting from the implementation and to propose amendments to the agreement. The RP Border Committee is now based in Panacan, Davao City, and another is in Menado, Indonesia. Joint Directives and Guidelines on the Implementation of the 1956 Agreement were signed in 1965. These were superseded in 1975 by the Revised Agreement on Border Crossing which resulted from the 1974 Menado Summit between President Marcos and Suharto.

Although the Philippines and Indonesia are close neighbors, they are not important trading partners in terms of total exports and imports of one country to or from the other. Indonesia's trade with the Philippines is insignificant in comparison with its trade with the other countries of the world (*Country Profile, Indonesia*, 32). From 1980 to 1984, the Philippines bought more and sold less to Indonesia. By 1985, petroleum products became the major Philippine imports from Indonesia. There is more trade carried on from Zamboanga with Sabah and Malaysia and Singapore, than there is with Indonesia. Most of the traders of Sulu go to Sabah. It appears that only those from Balut and Sarangani go to Indonesia.⁶ Even among the ASEAN countries, the trade flow is small. Only 24 percent of the ASEAN global trade was with ASEAN countries in 1985 (*Indonesia Bulletin*, August 1985, 39).

A Philippine Economic Mission was sent to Indonesia in 1963 and it led to the conclusion of a Trade Agreement. Yet trade relations did not significantly improve. Recently, however, things have begun to improve in the trade relations of the two countries. Some Filipino entrepreneurs have made some headway in connection with public work projects, in investments, and have even entered into economic arrangements like the Philphos counter trade agreement with P.T. Petrokimia Gresik, whereby the former will sell phosphoric acid to the latter. Petrokimia, in turn, will sell ammonia to Philphos. But a greater future for Filipinos lies in the construction industry which for so long has been dominated by South Korean and Japanese firms.

Several Indonesians in Balut and Sarangani are engaged in border trade with North Sulawesi, selling mainly consumer goods like

maong pants, *barong* cloths, pots, plastic mats, Coca cola, even *sanggot*, a kind of sickle used in the Philippines. On their return trip, they bring *batik* cloths, kitchen wares, tapes and even cassette recorders. A border permit is valid for only one year and for a stay of thirty days in either country.

The businessmen and traders of Davao City have long been making overtures to open up Southern Mindanao and Northern Sulawesi to more trade and transactions. In 1974, Manuel Garcia, then President of the Davao Chamber of Commerce, went to Ujung Pandang and two years later, to Menado on his own initiative. As a result, a group of businessmen from Ujung Pandang arrived in Davao City in 1978 for a "getting-to-know-you" kind of visit. The barter trade in Zamboanga has ended and some Muslim traders want to trade with Indonesia. To promote more contacts, a direct sea link between Davao City and Bitung, the chief port of North Sulawesi, was opened (*Indonesia Bulletin*, July-August-September 1987, 17). An air link is also proposed, since "Menado is only one and one-half hours flying time by commercial jet plane from Davao City" (*Bulletin Today*, 22 August 1986, 5). Buraq Airlines of Indonesia used to fly regularly between Davao and Menado with YS 11 planes, but the service was suspended after martial law was declared in the Philippines in 1972 (as told to the author by Natanagara, Davao City, 9 January 1989).

There have been some low points in the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Indonesia. This was especially so in the 1950s with the Communist Party waxing strong in Indonesia, while the HUKBALAHAP was active in the Philippines. Added to this was the increasing number of illegal Indonesian entrants to Southern Mindanao. In 1958, the situation was further complicated by the Saulo affair. A third-ranking member of the Huk leadership at that time, Alfredo Saulo sought asylum for himself and his family at the Indonesian Embassy. The stalemate was finally resolved when Saulo gave himself up to the Philippine government representatives, but not before relations soured. Also in 1958, the "Young Colonels" in North Indonesia rebelled against the Java-based central government. A revolutionary government was proclaimed. The Philippines and some of its officials were perceived by the Indonesian government to be sympathetic to the rebel cause. The relationship deteriorated further because with Garcia as President, the leadership in the Philippines was more vigorous in the anti-communist campaign. Also, the Philippines' ambivalent stand on the question of West Irian when

it was brought to the attention of the United Nations did not endear the Philippines to Indonesians. Finally, the introduction of "guided democracy" in Indonesia made it possible for the communists to be invited to join the government (Roesnaki 1970).

It is one thing to make good laws and another thing to implement them. This is especially true with regard to the legal-diplomatic agreements signed by both countries concerning illegal immigration and entry. The Border Crossing Agreement allowed the nationals of both countries' border areas to cross over, but many overstayed or went beyond the designated places. How else can one explain the significant number of Indonesians in South Cotabato, for example, when that province is well beyond the border area of Balut? How to police the Southern Philippines backdoor with limited funds and manpower is a dilemma yet to be resolved by the agencies tasked with implementing these agreements. Not only do illegal entrants pose problems, but also smugglers, gunrunners and others engaged in illegal activities.

Indonesia was the first country visited by President Aquino in 1986. This underscores the fact that her administration attached great importance to good relations with this neighbor in the south. Aside from the earlier racial, cultural and historical ties that bind the Philippines and Indonesia, there are a number of good reasons for the importance of Indonesia to the Philippines and vice versa. Some of these are the facts that outside of Taiwan, Indonesia is the Philippines' nearest neighbor. Indonesia is a big country in terms of area and population and is a potential power in the region, and is an ASEAN partner. A majority of the people of Indonesia are Muslims who live not far from their Muslim brothers in Southern Philippines. Being Third World nations, both countries share mutual problems, interests and concerns. As archipelagoes, they have claims to overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and continental shelves, and also have common maritime borders.

No amount of wishful thinking can blot out the presence of the Indonesians in Southern Philippines. They and their forefathers have been in the country for decades. Most of them have opted to stay, although some have decided to return to their homeland. Are they a bane or boon to the host country? It can be perceived both ways. The Indonesian presence can be seen as a boon that can enhance the bilateral relations of the homeland and the adopted country. The Indonesians are hard-working and their potential could be tapped and developed so they will become assets rather than liabilities to

the host country. They have a rich culture that can be showcased. The brochure of Davao del Sur invites people to visit the Indonesian community in Balut. They have much to offer the tourists. The three islands of Sarangani municipality have a number of scenic spots, hot springs and the waters around are a haven for scuba-divers, sailing enthusiasts and sea-shell collectors.

On the other hand, the Indonesian diaspora is a potential powderkeg which, in the wrong hands, can strain the relations of the two countries. It is a bane in the sense that the Indonesians are generally illegal entrants, and are quite a large and entrenched alien presence in the Philippines' southern backdoor. The Indonesians offer cheap labor and, therefore, compete with Filipino labor, and their presence is deemed to aggravate the unemployment problem. Some quarters in the Philippines have associated communist infiltration in the south with the influx of these Indonesians. Some Filipinos also fear a kind of Muslim irredentism with the proximity of Mindanao to Indonesia and the influence of Muslim culture. And smuggling, illegal fishing, even gunrunning had been noted by both governments in the border areas.

The pattern of migration would negate the allegation that the Indonesians were communist infiltrators. They usually migrated and settled as families. The fear of a Muslim *irredenta* is also unfounded, because most of the Indonesians are Protestant Christians. The irredentist tendency has been manifested by some Muslim groups in Mindanao, but it is unlikely that it will ever be a part of the Indonesians' agenda for themselves as settlers in the Philippines. They are not known for being troublemakers. In fact, this may be one of the reasons why only a few Filipinos outside of Region XI know that the Indonesians are in Southern Mindanao. They usually keep to themselves and avoid trouble.

The prospects are bright for Philippine-Indonesian relations. Both are committed to the ideals and aspirations of ASEAN. Indonesia's foreign policy after 1966 has been geared toward making friends rather than enemies. A welcome development was the recently announced intention of Indonesia to promote south-south cooperation by giving other Third World countries the chance to participate in Indonesia's national economic development. However, development plans cannot be pursued unless stability and security within the country as well as in the neighboring countries are ensured. Peaceful co-existence, therefore, is a desideratum.

Notes

1. A number of unpublished theses and dissertations which tackle Philippine-Indonesian relations are the following: Mamora (1982); Palacios (1988); Roesnadi (1970); Suradji (1983); Ver (1968).
2. These are different kinds of sailing crafts.
3. This was revealed by Paul Horman and Johanes Yanis, in interviews conducted in Manandu, Balut, 23 April 1986 and in Sarangani on 4 January 1989, respectively.
4. *Philippine-Indonesia Relations Folder*, Foreign Service Institute; Palacios (1988, 4).
5. *Transmigrasi* means "the resettlement of people from one region to another in the framework of establishing new communities to develop the regions, both the region of origin and the new settlement areas in the frame of the over-all national development." *Indonesia 1988 Handbook*, p. 174.
6. This was the observation of Yan Kekenusa, Immigration and Consular Affairs Officer, Indonesian Consulate General, Davao City, 3 January 1986.

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