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Keywords
Mandala, religious origins, Islam

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Mandala and Its Significance in Magindanao Muslim Society

*by Mark S. Williams**

Abstract

Starting as an Indic symbol for meditation, musings about the universe, and striving towards the end of suffering leading to Nirvana, the *mandala* has actually had a much more practical legacy for political leadership in which one central 'divine king' is flanked and protected in tributary relationship by a 'circle of kings' that owes the one 'man of prowess' their allegiance and devotion in some binding fashion. Used in Hindu India, Buddhist Southeast Asia, and also in the Islamic Malay regions, mandalic polities have seemingly defied the odds against other systems of governance that would vie against them for legitimacy and acceptability among the subject peoples under their spheres of influence.

Introduction

A fundamental Indian symbol, which is the focus of this study, has left an indelible mark on many Indic cultures in peninsular and insular Southeast Asia: the *mandala*. While its meaning in Sanskrit is simply 'circle,' it defies simple definitions for full explanation and understanding. As is true in most non-Western cultures, India and other Hindu-Buddhist Asian cultures champion a more holistic idea of human society. Juxtaposed to the Western Enlightenment ideal of 'separation of church and state,' then, is the epitome of Asian societies nurtured from their Indic roots: the Hindu societies of India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and parts of Indonesia (today, notably Bali); and, the Buddhist societies of the Champa states (present-day Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam), Siam (Thailand), and other parts of the Malay archipelago (sections of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia today) (Mason 2000).

In grasping the implication of this holistic understanding of the mandala in Indian and 'Hinduized' cultures, we begin to appreciate the significance of the mandala – and the values and cultural structures that have emanated from it – wherever it is to be found in Asia. Specifically, in this study, we will explore its origins and manifestations: first, as the symbolic and religious ideal of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs originating from the Indian subcontinent; then, as a social and political structure by which certain societies were organized and their peoples governed. We will then include the contact of Islam with the insular regions of Southeast Asia – especially the island of Mindanao (southern Philippines) – in order to gauge Islamic impact upon the mandalas existing there.

Symbolic and Religious Origins of the Mandala

The concept of the mandala starts as a symbol, a symbol that is both simple and profound in its human social implications. Simply, the mandala is a circle (Bowker 1997:610), but not just any circle. "[I]t is often a pattern of concentric circles, rectangles, and overlapping triangles" (Johnson n.d:4). In this fashion it "follows a precise symbolic format…indicating an all-including pervasion…" (Bowker 1997:610). Because "the word *mandala* derives from the Sanskrit: *manda* meaning 'essence' and *la* meaning 'container'…(Grey 2001:2; italics in original), as a symbol it represents something much greater than itself. It comes, in fact, to "…be a visual representation of the universe" (Johnson n.d:4) by which the whole of the society guides its populace and their lives. By taking on the characteristics and ideals of something beyond what is tangible or known in the natural, the mandala lends itself to explanations and explorations of the 'intangible' and the 'supernatural.'

The second original conception of the mandala, therefore, fits quite nicely into the realm of the religious. Part of its profundity is apparent in the fact that the mandala is not only a "sacred circle" but also a "sacred space…[that] carries with it connotations of integration with a higher consciousness…" (Dellios 2003:3). The description of the mandala in its Hindu form gives further illustrations of this:

> [It] consists first of an outer ring of flames. This gives the area a protective nature…as the yogin visualizes his entry into the mandala…. A second circle consists of a ring of *vajras*, symbolizing the indestructible quality of enlightenment…. [T]here is a third circled (*sic*) of eight cemeteries, in which die eight superficial modes of consciousness…. A final ring of lotus petals signify the purity of the land which the yogin now enters. (Bowker 1997:610; italics in original)

As the mandala concept progressed from one Indian religious expression (Hinduism) to another (Buddhism), a paradox emerged. "The paradox of the mandala is that while it is structured in a centred, symmetrical and directional mode, in its Hindu-Buddhist formulation it seeks to impart the view of the illusoriness of the world (or 'samsara'), of reality as 'empty'" (Dellios 2003:3; cf. Lund 2003:1). In its apparent ability to transcend material reality itself,[1]1 the mandala could truly fulfill its nature as "an all-including pervasion" (Bowker 1997:610) and become a structure for more than just mental and spiritual abstractions.

The Mandala in Southeast Asian Polities

From the original concept as mental symbolism and spiritual abstraction came a much more tangible, and socially practical, use of the mandala: a structure for polities. It is generally understood in most human cultures that leadership and governance must emanate from some over-arching authority. For the majority of these, a central kingdom (or oligarchy – leadership by a noble elite) would normally receive its mandate for rule by divine anointment or divine appointment, whichever fit into the culturally acceptable practice. Therefore, in this discussion, it is important to realize that the legitimacy of the Indic central king's rulership was enhanced by the centripetal power of attraction,[2] 2 inherent in devising a polity on the mandala principle.

This is notably different from the Western ideal of kingdoms – especially those European monarchs engaged in colonialism from A.D. 1500-1900 – because "the importance of a mandala did not depend on its geographical size but on networks of loyalties that could be mobilized to provide armed power to leaders . . . " (Wolters 1982:25). Indeed,

> [the] mandala system of power distribution…[and] the extent of a kingdom's power and reach was determined by the strength of its central polity. This mandala system can be conceptualised as a series of concentric rings (but in no way uniform) emanating from a kingdom's centre of power, representing diminishing spheres of influence as one moves further away from the seat of power. Fixed borders did not exist. Instead, buffering all kingdoms were fluid, gradual transitions of authority and sovereignty. (Dimmock 2003:1)

In keeping with traditions and values upholding 'divine ownership' of the land upon which they lived and controlled, these Indic mandala polities had no conception of 'national identity' and 'nation-states' as would become dominant under Western colonial expansion. Whereas most Western forms of governance act more centrifugally,[3]3 radiating leadership out from the one-man or group-powered centre to the lower levels of government below (states, provinces, districts, etc.), "integral to the concept of a mandala is the notion that power emanates from a central deity" (Lund 2003:2). In this sense, then, the king or overlord in the mandala polity was seen more as a vice-regent to the divinity or divinities from which came his authority to rule. Therefore, even though some have said that this structure is " . . . similar to the feudal system of Europe, [mandala] states were linked in overlord-tributary relationships. Compared to feudalism however, the [mandala] system gave greater independence to the subordinate states; it emphasised personal rather than official or territorial relationships . . . " (Chamas 2005:1). Relationships to the tributary leaders within mandalas will be revisited later.

In the context of religions which came to dominate the Asian landscape comes the understanding of the success of the mandala as a structure for polity and society. Indeed, of the many 'Hindu-Buddhist mandalic polities' (Dellios 2003:2) in Southeast Asia, the more notable ones in the peninsular regions included Angkor in Cambodia and Ayutthaya in Thailand; insular empires included Srivijaya and Majapahit in Indonesia (Aaron 2005; Chamas 2005; Dellios 2003). Details of these kingdoms and

empires are beyond the scope and focus of this study. However, detailing the significance of the symbolic and religious importance of the mandalic structure in the Javanese Hinduized kingdom before Srivijaya and Majapahit is significant and relevant:

> Another major kingdom flourished in central Java in the seventh century, and must have been appreciable because it built the tremendous monument called the Borobadur. This huge Buddhist shrine is a series of almost three miles of terraces built over a natural hill. The galleries of these terraces are flanked with stones on which thousands of bas-reliefs are carved with wonderful skill. There are some 400 statues of the Buddha, and the structure is crowned by a temple on the flattened top of the hill. (Mason 2000:36)

Renowned throughout the whole Buddhist world, "the [Borobudur] structure provides a vivid visual expression of how Salindra rulers in Java ‘localized’ Indian ideas in order to enhance their own position" (Johnson n.d:2). Borobudur architecturally encapsulates a ‘pattern of concentric circles’ and its symbolic ‘symmetry’ is quite evident in this mandala cum Buddhist shrine (Art Asia n.d:4).

Alongside the 'overlord-tributary relationship' another central feature is carried by the mandalic polity: "Divine kingship did not obliterate the smaller centers [of leadership], however; it enabled the growth of wider networks of personal loyalties called *mandalas* (circle of kings) with one king at the center acknowledged as the universal ruler" (Abinales & Amoroso 2005:25; italics in original). As indicated above by Dimmock, the tributary relationship of the mandalic polity contributed to the centripetal progression that allowed for "…fluid, gradual transitions of authority and sovereignty" (2003:1). It was not a mandala characteristic for one monarchial king to be over his subjects as in the European colonial powers; rather, the mandalic polity was an oligarchic network of lesser kingdoms, bound by some tributary pact arrangement with each other.[4]4 Those who have especially studied the peninsular polities of Angkor and Ayutthaya (e.g., Wolters 1982) began to discover a pattern – a veritable life-cycle from one mandalic polity to the next:

> [A]t the beginning of each cycle, political power and economical control were scattered among hamlets ruled by individual chiefs. The second phase began with the emergence of a man of prowess, who using military skills and a band of loyal followers consolidated authority and built a centralized polity. At the peak of the cycle, the king controlled a centralized state and its revenues. However, within a few generations, when the center became weak the outlying tributary states then declared their independence and decentralization follows. (Leavis n.d:4)

The ingredients for success in the burgeoning mandalic polity, then, had to include a "man of prowess," first alluded to by Wolters (1982). For efficient progress in each cycle, "individual prowess is critical in securing the support and loyalty of followers, both male and female. Therefore it is relevant to understanding political and social organization" (Paredes 2000:21) within the mandalic polity itself. Wolters further stipulates that

> leaders in neighbouring areas would recognize the higher spiritual status of a man of outstanding prowess and seek to regularize their relations with him by means of alliances that acknowledged the inequality of the parties. In this way, more distant areas would be brought into a closer relationship with one another. (1982:8-9)

Such ‘men of prowess’ would be "…attributed with an abnormal amount of personal and innate ‘soul stuff,’ which explained and distinguished their performance from that of others in their generation" (Wolters 1982:6). This characteristic developed into a ‘cult of personality’ necessary to command his following. Indeed, "the entourage is a natural outcome of one’s prowess because humans find power attractive…" (Paredes 2000:21). This aspect is pertinent not only to the Hindu-Buddhist expressions of the mandala polities, but also to the Mindanao context, and will therefore be discussed in-depth below.

The Advent of Islam in the Indic World

Hinduism enjoyed many thousands of years of influence in India and the Hinduized societies of South

and Southeast Asia. While Buddhism came later, it still enjoyed a strong following until the advent of Islam. This foreign religion – originating as it did from Arabia and not India – became a fierce competitor for the religious (and social) allegiances of Indians and other Hinduized peoples, especially in insular Southeast Asia. What is pertinent to highlight is how Islam accommodated itself into the Indic world – first of all, in India itself (especially as Sufism), and then in Southeast Asia, especially the Malay insular regions.

Islam in India

First with regard to the Indian subcontinent, Islam did not enter without opposition. After all, here is a strongly monotheistic, foreign faith encountering the bastion of polytheism in Hinduism, professing millions of gods. While this dialectical opposition of the two religions presumes the death-knell for either one or the other, a striking accommodation led to a unique co-existence on the Indian subcontinent.

> Islam did not conquer nor convert all of India's Hindus. Many resisted the imposition of a foreign religion that they considered antithetical to that which had been followed for hundreds of years. However, the syncretistic tendencies of Hinduism helped smooth the path toward coexistence. . . .
>
> Islam seemed unable to infuse the same strength into Indian Muslims as it did into the Arabs. . . . Yet Sufism made very significant gains on the subcontinent in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. (Parshall 1983:33)

It would be the Sufi tradition in Islam – 'distinct from the path of the sharia' [Islamic orthodoxy] (Library of Congress n.d:4) – that would capture the imagination of Indian Hindu and Buddhist mystics longing for a more personal experience with divinity,[5]5 in this case, one supreme deity.

> There is no better case study of Sufi expansion than events in the Indian subcontinent, for Hinduism is exceptionally syncretistic. Hindus always stand ready to accept a "new path" as long as it doesn't make exclusive claims. Sufism was able to assimilate many Indian cultural and religious rituals. (Parshall 1983:32)

Islam in Malay Southeast Asia

As Islam accompanied the Indian travelers and merchants who charted and traded in the Malay archipelago southeast of the subcontinent, similar contact and penetration of this foreign religion into the Hindu-Buddhist realms of Southeast Asia progressed to such an extent that "a classical Malay history dates the coming of Islam to Sumatra precisely at 1204 A.D." (McAmis 2002:11-12). From Sumatra, Islam also reached into Java, the home of the Indic Majapahit empire. Due to the Hinduization of those subject peoples, a similar reaction to accommodating Islam was experienced in these primary Indonesian islands: "The main Muslim teachings were presented, but many of the old pre-Islamic beliefs and customs persisted" (:13). Indeed, such a "peculiar character of Islam in this setting" would bring about "doctrinal contention within the Indonesian umat [community of faith, often transliterated as *ummah*]" especially due to Sunni Muslim orthodox "assaults on syncretist tradition" (Beatty 1999:125). In the literature, this accommodation is referred to as "Folk Islam,"6 [6] which basically refers to those practices which ". . .the orthodox [Islamic] community considers aberrant" (Parshall 1983:16).

By recognising that the accommodation of Islam into the Indic world was affected by syncretism with Hindu, Buddhist and other indigenous animist elements into these Southeast Asian islands, we begin to appreciate a comment by Johnson regarding the Indic mandalic polities endemic in these regions: "Hindu and Buddhist [mandala] models of kingship fit and enhanced ideas that already existed in Southeast Asia, so <u>syncretism</u> occurred and made a lasting impression" (n.d:2; underlining in original).

The Situation on Mindanao

Even though Mindanao is today the large southern part of the 'only Christian nation in Asia,' it should not come as a surprise that this is only a recent transformation. Before the penetration of Roman Catholic Christianity by the Spanish in the 1500s, and Protestant Christianity by the Americans in the 1900s, the whole of the Philippines was likewise charted and explored by Indic merchants and traders who first brought Hindu and Buddhist influences and, later, brought Islam – especially to Sulu and Mindanao, but even as far north as Manila (Majul 1999:69-77,78-84). The 'contact history' of Mindanao with Indic merchants and sailors is evident in the Sanskrit linguistic evidence remaining in several Mindanaon languages today (Francisco 1988:28ff). Stronger still is the evidence that

> on the basis of written sources, scholars, like Najeeb Saleeby, estimated the coming of Indian influence in the Philippines to be not later than the 5th century A.D. He divided the Indian expansion of Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, into four stages. . . . The Indian intrusion into the archipelago, according to Saleeby, belongs to the second stage of the commercial era. . . . It was only when a powerful Hindu civilization in Java and Sumatra developed that commercial activities in the area increased and cultural contacts expanded. (Jocano 1998:141)

The fact that 'Indian influence' in Mindanao and her peoples is corroborated by strong historical evidence leads to the next point in this study. Not only were Indic notions, such as the mandala, brought to the cultures of this large South China Sea island, but also the syncretising influences of Hinduism (left in certain value systems and folklore) would have its affect both on the indigenous religions of the Mindanaon peoples and on Islam, once that foreign religion penetrated the island. I have explored several 'folk' characteristics of Islam as practiced by Magindanaons already (Williams 1997), so this syncretic aspect of Islam in Mindanao is documented already.

We concentrate the remainder of this study, therefore, on the Mindanaon polities that evolved through Indic and, ultimately, Islamic influences: the Magindanao sultanates. "In Mindanao, the only famous mandalas were the Magindanao sultanates, based in and around the mouth of the Pulangi river, which peaked at different times with several 'men of prowess,' including Datu Uto of Buayan during the late 1800s, and Kudrat / Corralat of Cotabato during the early 1600s, at its political center . . ." (Paredes 2000:18; underlining in original). For the sake of better understanding and proper chronology, we look first at Sultan Kudarat, and then at Datu Uto.

Sultan Kudarat [Qudarat]

With regards to the nature of leadership that characterizes the 'chief' of the 'circle of kings' in mandala structures, the historical account of Magindanao leadership by Sultan Muhammad Dipatuan Qudarat (d. 1671) is quintessential. Not only did Qudarat exude the *persona* of a leader that was larger-than-life (supernatural exploits are attributed to him in Magindanaon folklore [Kilates 1993:4-13]), but he was also the first leader to forge the various 'mandalic' datuships of extended Magindanaon families into a 'sultanate' structure – strong enough to rival and compete with the existing sultanates of Sulu, Brunei, and Ternate (Laarhoven 1989:36ff, esp. p. 40). Seemingly born and named to be the majestic leader that he would become,

> [S]ultan Diputwan Qudrat [was] the Corralat of Combes [the Spanish historian]. The word **Dapitwan** is Malay in origin and means "master" or "sir." The word **qudrat** is Arabic and means "powers." The letters **d** and **r** and **r** and **l** are interchangeable in Moro, and the word Qudrat is commonly pronounced **kudlat** or **kurlat**; hence the corrupted form "Corralat." (Saleeby 1974:189; bold-lettering in original)

It is further mentioned that "Sultan Qudarat overshadowed his father, Bwisan, and ruled with a strong hand. He was probably the strongest and greatest Mindanao sultan that ever lived. He fought the Spaniards bitterly and held their sovereignty in check for many years" (:189).

In ‘mandalic’ fashion, then,

> under the seventeeth-century sultan Kachil Kudrat, the divided Magindanao communities – those belonging to *sa-ilud* (lower valley and coastal area), of which Cotabato town was the known capital, and those in *sa-raya* (upper valley), of which Dulawan was the capital – were unified, leading to the establishment of the first centralized Magindanao sultanate….
>
> Magindanaos displayed close affinity with other maritime Southeast Asian communities in how their communities were organized. . . . They acted like the Southeast Asian "men of prowess" that O.W. Wolters writes of: strong men whose power lay not in a span of territory, but in their ability to project armed power to gain control of slave labor and monopolies on tradable products. . . . (Abinales 2000a:47; italics in original)

Abinales likens such ‘men of prowess’ with the Bahasa Malay term "orang besar" (:47) – meaning, ‘big man.’ Such men as Qudarat, however, could not remain big with ‘prowess’ to stabilize the mandalic sultanate without their 'project[ed] armed power' in the guise of the ‘circle of kings’ – in this case, the datus which comprised the sultan’s royal-cabinet.

> In the more important administrative and policy decisions, the…Sultan was advised by the *Ruma Bichara* ("House of Discussion"), a council of the most powerful and influential datus. The heir apparent (Raja Muda) and the second heir apparent (*Maharaja Adinda*), if designated, were also members of the council…. There was [also] a *Wazir* or Prime Minister; and a minister (*Datu Ladja Laut*) in charge of fitting out naval expeditions; and yet another minister (*Datu Maharaja Layla*) who took charge of customs and import duties…. (Gowing 1979:51; italics in original)

In terms of Islamic orthodoxy, then, the Magindanaon sultanate structure seemed aberrant due to a veritable deification of the ‘men of prowess’ in their known exploits (e.g., Sultan Kudarat in folklore, as noted above). Once we recall that we are confronted here with Folk Islam as practiced by the Magindanaons, it not only dissuades us from discounting the mandalic nature of the Magindanao Sultanate, but it also lines up with Johnson’s statement (above) regarding the necessary quality of "syncretism" (n.d:2) in all Southeast Asian mandalas, whether Hindu-Buddhist of Folk Islamic.

Datu Uto [Uttuh]

The second Magindanaon ‘man of prowess,’ from the sultanate of Buayan, is "Sultan Anwar ud-Din Utto" (Majul 1999:31), known more commonly as ‘Datu Uto.’ Recalling the above comment about Sultan Qudarat’s ability to "unify" the lower-valley (Cotabato / Magindanao) community with the upper-valley Magindanaon community of Dulawan and Buayan (Abinales 2000:47), two hundred years after Qudarat’s death, the Buayan community would flex its muscles in a move to separate – and eventually hope to dominate – her lower-valley sister sultanate of the Rio Grande delta of Cotabato town.

Datu Uto had been able to place himself into this position of power due (again) to the Mindanaon ‘circle of kings’ – the datus and "sub-sultans" – who were allied and pledged to the Buayan sultanate:

> In the *Pulangi* [i.e., Rio Grande], many of these sub-sultanates pledged loyalty to the Sultan of Buayan, Sultan Marajanuddin, who was in turn succeeded in 1865 by his brother, Sultan Bayao of Kudarangan. In 1875, Datu Utto or Sultan Anwaruddin Utto, son of Sultan Marajanuddin, took over as Sultan of Buayan…. [He] also maneuvered to be declared jointly as Sultan of Maguindanao…. But the Spaniards opposed his inclination vehemently. They saw in Datu Utto the making of a "second Qudarat." Datu Utto was able to unite the minor sultanates along the *Pulangi*, including those of Talayan, Buluan and Kabuntalan. (Jubair 1999:52)

Although Uto’s reign is characterized less by supernatural ‘divine’ exploits (befitting of a mandalic ruler) and more as a reign of "terror" (Beckett 1982:399; McKenna 1998:64), his prowess in "intervening in local matters of other [datu] kingdoms" (Bautista 1976) would solidify his grasp on the Buayan sultanate as it built up economic power and political influence on through the nineteenth century to the end of the Spanish colonial era.

> *Having attained a significant position in the valley, Datu Uttuh would now intervene in local matters of other kingdoms that would make the Spaniards uneasy due to his growing influence. After establishing firm relationship with as many kingdoms from Upper Pulangi down to the valleys, Datu Uttuh was able to exact tributes and eventually became wealthy. At one point, he ordered arms from Sulu. By 1880, Datu Uttuh became the most powerful datu in Cotabato*. . . . (Bautista 1976, quoted in Bascar 2004:18-19; italics in Bascar)

Recalling one prime quality of the mandala polity (above), i.e., that "[mandala] states were linked in overlord-tributary relationships" (Chamas 2005:1), we again appreciate the pronouncement that "the only famous mandalas [in Mindanao] were the Magindanao sultanates," and Wolters (1982) himself specifically ". . . includes Magindanao, under Datu Uto of Buayan, in his discussion of historical mandalas" (Paredes 2000:18).

An economic, political, and military empire truly befitting a supreme ruler of a Mindanaon mandala was the situation Datu Uto made for himself during the hey-day of his reign. The Philippine historian Reynaldo Ileto has done the most in-depth study of "the career of Datu Uto" (1971), in which he attributes the success of the ascendancy of the Buayan sultanate at this time to his ingenuity, cunning – and cruelty (cf. Beckett 1982:399). Indeed, it was his adept ". . . combination of agriculture and labor-power which allowed for the 'development of a wealthy ruling class in Buayan' and 'would account for its early paramountcy' [quoting Ileto 1971:2]. [Furthermore,] the Spanish records note the military might of the Buayan cultural core" (Warren 2002:30).

The "emphasis on chiefly status display in residential structures" (Junker 2000:146) of sultans like Uto was not considered ostentatious at all; rather, it was a necessary demonstration of essential mandalic leadership at the center of the polity:

> Datu Uto's abode, unlike commoner or lesser-elite houses, is described as multiroomed (with the rooms separated by finely carved wooden screens) and large enough to accommodate more than thirty of his kinsmen, retainers, and slaves…. In addition, the interior walls of the chief's house were lined with an impressive arsenal of daggers, spears, swords, shields, imported European shotguns, and other armaments symbolically attesting to his regional military supremacy. (Junker 2000:146-147)

As in the sultanate of Cotabato under Kudarat two-hundreds years before him, Uto's circle-of-kings tributary datus in Buayan were comprised of

> some sort of "Council of Ministers," of which the most prominent was the Minister of War, Datu Kabalo. There was also the Collector of Customs who manned the toll stations at Bakat, and a Grand Judge who also exercised the role of *Executioner*. Datu Piang, a Chinese Maguindanao, was Minister of Lands, or administrator of Uto's extensive holdings. (Lucman 2000:202; italics in original).

The Magindanao sultanates of Cotabato and Buayan, therefore, represent the Muslim heritage of the "Hindu-Buddhist mandalic polities" (Dellios 2003:2) in its 'folk' expression in Mindanao, and this is confirmed in the exploits of Sultan Kudarat and Datu Uto.

Whither the Mandala Among the Magindanao?

After the time of Datu Uto, Datu Piang (mentioned above in Lucman 2000), as 'heir apparent' for Sultan, was presented with a situation that the mandalic sultanates had never before faced: Foreign intrusion and colonialism would change the 'overlord-tributary relationship' that characterized the Magindanao mandala polity structure. Although the Spaniards never successfully wrenched political power away from either the Sulu or Magindanao sultanates before their retreat in losing the Spanish-American War (Majul 1999:370-372), American policies – and superior firepower – would force all Filipino Muslims to acquiesce to 'integrating' into a national polity under central Manila governance (Gowing 1979:208ff).

The effect that imposing a Western ‘centrifugal’ governance format (focused on Manila) had on the ‘centripetal’ mandala polity of the Magindanao sultanates was detrimental and, without exaggeration, contributed to what several authors call the 'decline' of the sultanate structure (Jubair 1999:xiv; Laarhoven 1989:x; and, Majul 1999:viii, especially). An example from the lower, *barangay* level of Philippine government illustrates the tension: "[Even though,] on the local level, the roles of mayor and sultan are largely compatible, . . . strain arises . . . because of the shift in the locus of force from the indigenous to the national system" (Mednick 1974:228). In other words, there emerges a veritable ‘tug-of-war’ between centripetal and centrifugal styles of polity.

It is clear that "had the Magindanaos succeeded in keeping the Spanish and Americans out of southern Mindanao, their relations with the Southeast Asian regional trading network would have continued" (Abinales 2000b:216), solidifying the Indic and Islamic mandalic ties they had historically linked them for centuries. In a vain attempt to rectify this apparent tension, Manila allowed for the creation of BIMP-EAGA [Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area] in the early nineties in order to create an ". . . opportunity to renew cultural and ethnic ties with their East ASEAN neighbors and build upon historical trade ties that date back . . ." to the time of the Indic merchants and sailors that influenced the whole of insular Southeast Asia (MEDCo 2004). While there is exuberance and hope in what BIMP-EAGA can mean for progress and development in the region, the fact that this is a Manila-driven program taints the optimism among Filipino Muslims – Magindanaons included – that are wary of the national ‘integration’ rhetoric which is inherently juxtaposed to the mandalic polity of sultanate rule which they champion.

Conclusion

Starting as a symbol for meditation of self, musings about the universe, and striving towards the end of suffering leading to Nirvana, the mandala has actually had a much more practical legacy in the guise of a leadership polity in which one central ‘divine king’ is flanked and protected in tributary relationship by a ‘circle of kings’ that owes the one ‘man of prowess’ their allegiance and devotion in some binding fashion. Used first in Hindu India, and manifested across Buddhist Southeast Asia, then finally accommodating to the folk expression of Islam, the "mandalic polities" (as Dellios 2003 terms them) have seemingly defied the odds against other polities and systems of governance that would vie against them for legitimacy and acceptability among the subject peoples under their spheres of influence.

One over-arching question presents itself for final analysis here at the conclusion: How is it possible ". . . that even severe foreign influences did not result in the disappearance of mandalas that were already in place[?]" (Paredes 2000:18). The answer that emerges is equally momentous: Syncretism – in religious practice (Musk 1979 and Williams 1997) and in 'models of kingship' (Johnson n.d:2) – created the environment necessary for the successful accommodation and acceptance of the mandala concept to take place among the subject peoples who would live under its influence and guidance, and to give the divine-king – the ‘man of prowess’ – the reverence and support necessary to keep the overlord-tributary relationship intact. That the mandala had significance in the Magindanao societies of the sultanates under Kudarat and Uto has been demonstrated; that the mandala might yet have significance for Magindanao and other Filipino Muslim societies today has yet to be determined, especially if polity experiments championed by Manila – e.g., the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), and BIMP-EAGA – are found wanting.

Endnotes

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1. "A mandala serves as a pattern for meditation and as an aid (*yantra*) in achieving concentration and the state of meditation…. The mandala symbolizes that process through which the soul is liberated from its early life in order to attain perfection at the highest stupa [flat plain]: a meditative pilgrim's way to Nirvana, the state of non-existence sought by the Buddhist" (Art Asia n.d:4; italics in original).

2. According to Cassell, 'centripetal' means "tending to move towards the centre" (1998:180).

3. Cassell defines 'centrifugal' as "tending to move away from the centre" (1998:179).

4. "The emphasis on personal relationships was one of the defining characteristics of the mandala system. The tributary ruler was subordinate to the overlord ruler, rather than to the overlord state in the abstract. This had several important implications. Firstly, a strong ruler could attract new tributaries, and would have strong relationships over his existing tributaries…. Secondly and consequently, the tributary ruler could repudiate the relationship and seek either a different overlord or complete independence. Thirdly, the system was non-territorial. The overlord was owed allegiance by the tributary ruler, or at most by the tributary's main town, but not by all the people of a particular area" (Chamas 2005:2).

5. "A Sufi attains a direct vision of oneness with God, often on the edges of orthodox behavior, and can thus become a *pir* (living saint) who may take on disciples (*murids*) and set up a spiritual lineage that can last for generations. Orders of Sufis became important in India during the thirteenth century…" (Library of Congress n.d:4; italics in original).

6. "[Folk] Islam has added a whole life-way of animistic beliefs and practices. The use of the rosary for divining and healing, the use of amulets and talismans, the use of hair-cuttings and nail-trimmings, the belief and practice of saint-worship, the use of charms, knots, magic, sorcery, the exorcism of demons, the practice of tree and stone worship, cursing and blessing – these and many other animistic practices belie the gap between the theological religion and the actual religion [of Islam]" (Musk 1979:175).

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