

SUSTAINING SULU PEOPLE'S IDENTITY OF POWER, HISTORY AND CULTURE THROUGH THEIR VISUAL ARTS

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with power, history, culture and identity of the people of Sulu (or Lupah Sug), primarily the Tausug, as suggested by or expressed through their visual arts. An overview of Sulu history of power is narrated to provide the historical context for the definition of Sulu people's identity, as well as for the discussion of representative art samples such as the *ukkil* (Sulu curvilinear design) and military artifacts. Part of the introduction critically comments on the prevailing Philippine historical writings. The discussion also makes reference to some conceptual frameworks such as culture, art, history and "representation". Towards the end, the role of arts and culture in sustaining Sulu people's identity is highlighted.

Culture as Power

Power, being the unifying theme of the Sulu exhibit in this Museum brings to one's mind politics, economics and physical infrastructures as its primary determinants. While these outward factors had their significant contributions in Sulu people's empowerment, there is a more authentic source of Sulu power -- its culture which concretely and expressively manifests its potentials through the arts.

Culture as an ideational system for interpreting realities is often taken-for-granted by many people because much of culture operates at the unconscious level. This is not, however, the case of the people of Sulu who consciously regard their culture as the most meaningful source of strength that sustains their existence and defines their identity as a people. These cultural assertions find best expressions in their arts.

Art as Cultural Expression

Art as a cultural expression needs to be clarified. The popular notion of art seems to be associated with the "art for art's sake" kind of art that came about as a result of some people's reaction against art commercialization in Europe in the 19th century. An "art for art's sake" kind of art, otherwise known as aestheticism or formalism, is not the kind of art that can embody the culture or identity of a people, such as those of Sulu. Formalist art by its nature is detached from human concerns and aspires only for, what its believers regard as, the "pure" or "absolute"-- for which concerns an "art for art's sake" kind of art tends to be non-functional and separated from everyday life. This is not the kind that characterized the visual arts of Sulu, which are highly utilitarian and aesthetically pleasing at the same time.

As a cultural expression, art embodies the historical achievements and religious aspirations, as well as the skills and high sense of creativity and humane values of its creators.. Along this line, Sulu visual arts expressed the nuances of Sulu people's life which has been molded by religious consciousness, historical achievements and political struggles which together constitute the core of Sulu people's identity in their arts.

What History and For Whom?

As a people's identity in the Philippine setting is grounded in history, it is important to ask the questions: What history and for whom?

As we relate the history of Sulu to Philippine history as a whole, it is important to point out that Philippine history is not an innocent discipline but is socially constructed and tied to the structure of power. Its language and

texts are framed and carefully selected to correspond to the culture of power operating in the sites of the production of knowledge.

Why is past history important? It is because "...the past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past (in Kaye, 1995: 95). For the Sulu scholars, truth and honesty in historical writing should be the norms in scholarship. These values are not something that could be constructed or taken for granted.

In Philippine history today, an essential portion of the past, that of the history of Sulu and the Muslims in the Philippines, has been exteriorized, if not concealed. Reflecting on this problem, a Filipino journalist writes the following as part of his Sulu exhibit review, thus: "our apparently biased dominant Christian discourse seems to disable us from recognizing the great achievements of Muslim Filipinos, particularly the Tausug -- the setting up of state organizations beyond the level of the *barangay* and the maintenance of military might with the well-tested capability to resist the West" (McM Santamaria in *Business Mirror*, July 16, 2008). In Social Science such biased discourse is referred to as "representation."

"Representation" as a Problem

What is "representation"? Why is "representation" a problem to the Muslims in the Philippines, in general, or those of Sulu in particular.

"Representation" as a problem is clarified by Edward Said in his book "Orientalism" (1978). Said differentiates between "presence" as a "natural" depiction of a society and culture from "re-presence" which is "a highly artificial enactment" of such subjects.

In the contexts of Philippine cultural and historical writings, "representation" means the positioning of a subject, such as the Muslim, in texts by such ways as *selection*, *exteriorization* or *exclusion*. As could be gleaned from the representation of the Muslims in Philippine history, it is politics that bears upon the production of knowledge in the Philippines. Ideas, histories and national identity-building in the country operate in relation to the configuration of power of domination and of varying degrees of complex hegemony.

Indeed, the (mis)representations of the Muslims in texts have been conditioning many of their co-citizens to regard them (the Muslims) not as a people, with rights over their ancestral domains, but as a problem to be solved and their territories to be taken. This brings out the idea of geography as the material underpinning of the representations of the Muslims. The imagination that the Muslim is "a problem" dignifies conquest and enhances the longing of other people for more geographical space in Muslims' ancestral domains. This in effect translates to the aggravation of the land problem, as a major underpinnings of the Mindanao conflict. Viewed from a broader perspective, this has how the "(mis)representation" of the Muslims in Philippine history contributed to the Mindanao Problem.

The Two- Streams of Philippine Historical Development

Something often overlooked in the scholarship of Philippine history and culture is the crucial fact that the Philippine Muslims had for a long time developed their history quite independent from that of the Christian majority. The adoption by the majority of Christianity and western ways and lifestyles had pulled the Philippines towards the European and western pole of culture. As the majority Christian Filipinos looked towards Europe and the West for their development, the Muslims of the southern Philippines had continued to develop their culture and history along the Islamic and Malay line.

Philippine historical writing, therefore, should not blur the fact of separate histories and corresponding anti-colonial struggles of the two peoples-- the Muslims and the Christians -- with the former defending hard to *maintain* their independence while the latter fought to *regain* the independence that they had lost to the

colonizers. Both peoples have helped to bring about the present condition in the Philippines. In the words of Dr. Cesar Adib Majul, "the history of a conquered people who ultimately revolted has now merged with that of another who had remained unconquered." Unfortunately, the unlevelled playing field governing Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines, as compounded by the misrepresentation or exteriorization of the history and culture of the Philippine Muslims in the national psyche, has been sustaining the conflicts in the southern Philippines.

The importance of knowing the history of Muslims in the Philippines in relations to solving the Mindanao Problem was expressed by former Senator Wigberto Tañada who urged the government "to take the lead in enlightening people about the historic roots of the Mindanao Problem and why the rectification of the historical wrongs inflicted on the Moro people requires extraordinary measures (in *Today*, July 3, 1996). It is through the knowledge of Philippine Muslim history, particularly that of Sulu, that the Mindanao problem could be widely understood and positively dealt with.

OVERVIEW OF SULU PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF POWER

In Sulu history, the introduction of Islam in the 13th century was regarded by the Sulu people as God's blessing. Aside from reinforcing the gains that they had earlier accumulated through their *addat* (indigenous cultures) and Southeast Asian traditions, Islam had infused Sulu people and culture with a more comprehensive system of life and ideas for empowerment. As a result of Islamization, the people of Sulu learned Islamic knowledge and moral-ethical principles suitable for understanding and dealing with a more complex world such as the global community of the *ummah*, the Muslim's social world to which they belong. In politics and governance, Islam had provided the ideology and the system that gave rise to an integrated *bangsa* or nationality and legitimized the institution of the Sulu state, governed by the Sultanate which provided the leadership and formalized Sulu people's alliance with the neighboring Malay states.

Aside from Islam, the factors of geography and trade provided another catalysts for Sulu's empowerment. In the past, when Manila and Cebu were only enlarged villages, Jolo, the capital of Sulu, was the richest settlement in the pre-Spanish Philippines. Sulu's strategic location and possession of rich maritime and forest resources made it a primary center of international trade. Having fitted into the trade patterns between Europe and China, the commerce centered in Jolo had dominated the trade activities involving Borneo, Celebes, Singapore and Labuan, as well as Manila, Palawan and southern Mindanao. The Tausug merchants had established extensive linkages and developed complex set of interrelationships through trade pacts and marriages with other people, thus consolidating its power throughout its vast domains. As the economy of Sulu was organized around collecting and distributing marine and jungle products, this had, accordingly, generated demands for additional manpower to do the work of procurement (Warren, 1985). Such demands had intensified more Sulu's retaliatory raids for captives or "slaves",¹ especially from Spanish-held areas in the Philippines.

¹ James Francis Warren in his book "The Sulu Zone: 1768-1898" had acknowledged that the so-called slavery in Sulu was different from that of the West where a slave was treated as a property and the treatment was in general inhuman and degrading on the person. In Sulu it was not. The Tausug word that could approximate the word "slave" is *i-pun* or 'servitude'. Islam had done much to improve the lot of a person in this category. The *i-pun* in Sulu had much leeway for the enjoyment of certain rights—he could rise in social ladder to become a *sakop* (follower) or freeman, own property, and even conduct trade in behalf of his master. During the American period in Sulu, Brigadier General William A. Kobbe, writes in his Annual Report that: "the term 'slavery' as understood did not exist among the Moros...(It) was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the dress and manner of living of those regarded as 'slaves' from those Moros who were not slaves." Another observation was made by American anthropologist Henry Savage Landor who wrote that "...slaves (in Sulu) are treated so well--sharing the home and partaking of the identical food of his master..." (Landor: 1904: 207).

During the height of its glory, the rulers of Sulu had controlled vast territories² including parts of Kalimantan, Northeast Borneo, Palawan, Basilan and the islands in the Sulu Archipelago. Foreign powers did not only trade goods with the people of Sulu but dealt with them with the highest accord of respect through the treaties that Sulu signed with foreign sovereigns. The Sulu Sultanate had signed eight treaties with Spain, five with the British, two with French and three with the Americans.³ What Sulu leaders had signed “was a treaty, strictly so-called that is one between two sovereign and independent states, each is recognized as such by the other”, a Jesuit scholar wrote in 1935. (H. de la Costa S.J., 1935/1965:97).

During the advent of European colonization in Asia, the people of Sulu waged one of the longest resistance against colonialism in the region. In dealing with their adversaries, the people of Sulu took the challenge of not only transacting hard diplomacy with the colonizers but confronting them militarily, as need be. It was, initially, through contact with China and the Arab World that brought to Sulu knowledge of firearms and advanced methods of warfare. The Sulu people had utilized these gains to augment their traditional weapons and improved their fighting capabilities with additional knowledge and resources acquired from Europe.

SULU PEOPLE’S IDENTITY

Taking into consideration the overview of the history of Sulu presented above, the important aspects of Sulu people’s identity are summed up as follows:

1. As culturally-rich people whose visual arts and other aspects of culture link them with the people of Southeast Asia and the Islamic World.
2. As maritime people that had consolidated economic and political power in the 18th and 19th centuries due to Sulu’s role in the international trade between England and China.
3. As Muslim people with deep Islamic consciousness who are continuing with their struggle to safeguard their *addat* and Islamic-based identity from assimilation.
4. As historical people with colorful and heroic history of anti-colonial struggle.
5. As a misunderstood *bangsa* or nation of people, who because of their struggle for freedom and justice suffer from diverse effects of the deteriorating Sulu peace and order condition, rising criminality, economic poverty and the unlevelled playing field in Philippine affairs -- which the Sulu people regard as temporary setbacks and challenges.

“People of the Current” or “People of the Path of Knowledge”?

There is one important aspect of Sulu people’s identity that needs to be clarified at this point -- this has to do with the popularized label of the Tausug as the so-called “People of the Current”--“*tau*” means “people” and “*sug*” means “current” in Tausug dialect. According to some Sulu scholars, such label blurs the origin and correct equivalent of the word “*sug*”, a variation of the Malay word “*suluk*,” which is rooted in “*saliq*”, the Arabic word which

² Sulu territory became very extensive in the 1760s as can be read from the account of European writer and traveler, Alexander Dalrymple, who was in Sulu in 1761 and 1764. He writes that “ Sooloo...as an independent sovereignty had dominion so extensive (which included) Palawan, the Northwest and Northern parts of Borneo, and the intermediate islands were acquired from the King of Borneo... and were the price of the Sooloo aid in a civil war in the Kingdom of Borneo. About the year 1704 , the Sultan of Borneo made a cession of the north part of Borneo from Keemanes northward with the islands of Palawan, Banguay, Balambangan, etc to Sooloos” (Majul,1973:180-181, citing a London 1774 document, pp.18-19).

³ The Sulu Sultanate had treaty relations with Spain in 1578, 1646, 1725, 1737, 1805, 1837, 1851, and 1878; with the British in 1761, 1764, 1769, 1849, and 1878; with the French in 1843 and 1845 ; and with the Americans in 1842, 1899 and 1915 (Majul, 1973).

means “the path along which knowledge travels”. Linguistic-phonemic variations across cultures are cited to explain the shifts of the word form -- from the original word “*suluk*” to “*sulu*” or “*suk*,” then to “*sug*”. (Benj Bangahan, 2008)

On the above bases, concerned Sulu scholars recommend the popularization of the label for Tausug as “People of the Path of Knowledge”. They argue their points on the fact that the Sulu Archipelago had served as the “path” along which the teachings of the early Sufi Muslim missionaries, called *awliya* or *muqri*, traveled to other parts of the country.

The teachings of the *muqri* (which literally means “one who teaches others to read”) had become the foundation of a highly sought Tausug esoteric knowledge on “the wisdom of life” known as *ilmu’ mukali’* (from Arabic words ‘*ilm*’ or ‘knowledge’ and ‘*mukali*,’ a localized rendering of *muqri*). In Jolo, a special branch of *ilmu’ mukali’* called *ilmu’ pagkausug* (literally: “knowledge of manliness”) deals with a more specialized combat-related esoteric knowledge believed to heighten one’s courage in the battlefield.

THE EXPRESSIONS OF SULU PEOPLE’S IDENTITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS

In Southeast Asian context, the significant socio-cultural, economic and political interactions between the people of Sulu and other peoples of the region resulted in a number of commonly shared aspects of languages, features of *addat*, traditional customs and arts. In the visual arts, in particular, the Southeast Asian links of the people of Sulu are generally explored in the following paragraphs.

In Sulu, special occasion like wedding celebration is an opportunity for observing the traditions and total artistry of the Tausug people -- from their houses decorated with *luhul* (floriated canopy), to the variety of food they prepare and the colorful costumes, as well as the pieces of jewelry, worn by both the hosts and visitors. The costumes for Tausug men consists of *sawwal kuput* (tight-fitting pants) and *badju’ lapi’* (opened shirts), outfitted with *kandit* (waist sash), *pis siyabit* (kerchief or turban) and a *kalis* (*kris*) or *barung* (wide-bladed weapon) tucked to their waists. For the Sulu women, they wear Malay-type *sarong* or tight-fitting blouse called *batawi* paired with *habul tiyahian* (embroidered tubular garment).

With the traditional music from *kulintangan* (set of bronze gongs) or *gabbang* (bamboo xylophone) setting the mood, the experience of attending a celebration in Jolo reminds an Asian visitor of the strong links between Sulu art tradition with those of Asia, in general, or Southeast Asia, in particular. These links are affirmed more by the forms and designs of *sunduk* or gravemarkers, *mamaan* or betel boxes and woven textiles, among others. Sulu betel boxes, for example, bear “the beaten motifs of lotus blossoms” and other designs revealing similarities with some Thai and Khmer pieces. Many betel box designs are miniature versions of the larger *ukkil* carvings applied on some Sulu gravemarkers. On the Sulu textiles, such as *habul tiyahian* and *luhul*, *ukkil* is also utilized as design elements.

Ukkil

Central to the visual arts of the people of Sulu is the term and concept of *ukkil*. The word “*ukkil*” refers to both the act of carving or engraving and to a particular type of curvilinear design which combines scroll, leaf and vine elements organized in varying modes of abstract compositions. In the traditional visual arts of Sulu, *ukkil* presents a picture of a vast repertoire of art motifs carved on houses, boats, working tools, weapons and gravemarkers. Together with the geometric designs called *siyabit*, the curvilinear *ukkil* form the overall decorative arts of Sulu. As there is no word in Sulu language equivalent to “art”, the word “*ukkil*” is regarded as its nearest equivalent, and is sometimes used to mean *art*.

In the Sulu Archipelago, the three groups of people -- the Tausug, Sama and Badjao --use *ukkil* in variety of ways from which similarities and differences could be observed. The differences are explained by the cultural and

structural changes, particularly the effects of Islam, on their lives. Comparing their *ukkil* designs, particularly those found on their *sunduk* gravemarker, it can be generalized that the *ukkil* of the less Islamized Badjao are large, energetic and appear crude in execution. Each design element appears to be highly individualistic, alluding to the character of the Badjao as free-spirited and sea wanderers. As to the *ukkil* of the highly Islamized Tausug, the execution of this design on their gravemarker is minimal and rudimentary. Fundamental Islamic belief encourages the simplicity of design on sacred objects. This is not however the case on the non-religious objects such as their weapons. The Tausug decorate the blades and scabbards of their *kalis* and *barung* with *ukkil*, demonstrating high level of skills. The Tausug *ukkil* on these weapons are smaller, ornate and controlled.

Between the Badjao and the Tausug are the Sama *ukkil*, which are more stylized, intricate and quite conventional. On the Sama gravemarkers figurative forms are highly abstracted and stylized by the use of *ukkil* to the extent that these forms can no longer be easily discerned. The result of this abstraction and stylization is the highly elaborate and intricate design on the *sunduk* of the Sama.

Generally, Sulu *ukkil* arts show similarities with Southeast Asian curvilinear designs as well as the *arabesque* art of West Asia. The Sulu adaptation of foreign design elements is the ornate design which has a strong indigenous character, deriving its motifs from local plants, sea corals and native objects. There are forms that resemble waves but they appear more as growing plants or creeping vines. Wave forms are sometimes called the "Malayan style" of *ukkil*. They are common both in Sulu and Malaysia, perhaps because of the influence of the sea in these two areas. Some *ukkil* motifs were derived by Sulu artists from the Qur'an cover and Qur'an book stand called *lihal*. The beveled and intersecting motifs which are sometimes integrated in Sulu *ukkil* suggest the influence of Qur'an cover designs. In its abstraction, *ukkil* conforms to Islamic art specifications and expressed much of its art organizational principles.

***Ukkil* as Expressions of the Deeper Islamic Identity of the Sulu People**

The formal characteristics of the lines and shapes in an *ukkil* composition embody infinite patterning. A pattern is never completed within the assigned area. It hints at that which is infinite and beyond time and space.

Some Sulu *ukkil*, such as those of the *luhul* (canopy), portray natural-looking plants with well-defined stems, leaves and flowers. Derived from life-like ornaments, these motifs are transformed by Sulu artists into something that convey no notion of their realism. On other surfaces, the intricate and elaborate *ukkil* designs have the effect of aesthetically negating the weight of the materials. The base materials are hidden by the beautifying effect of intricate patterns which appear to transform the hard and heavy materials into something light and visually pleasing.

As aesthetic expression, *ukkil* has been profoundly affected by the Islamic logic of abstraction and infinite patterning of the curvilinear, geometric, floral and calligraphic design elements. The *ukkil* composition, as reinforced by the geometrical and calligraphic design elements, is an expression of the Sulu people's way of acknowledging through the arts God's Transcendence and Omnipresence, among others.

Sulu Military Artifacts as Expressions of Identity of Courage and Struggle for Freedom

The people of Sulu treasured their traditional weapons as symbols of the heroism of their forefathers who valiantly fought the foreign invaders for centuries. These military artifacts, described and discussed below, include the *lantaka*, *taming baran*, *pakukus* or hand weapons such as *kalis*, *barung*, *budjak*, and *taming*.

Lantaka

Lantaka is a small brass cannon of one or two inches bore and mounted on swivels. The Muslims mounted the *lantaka* on their *kuta* or war boats. Even long before the Spaniards arrived, the standard feature of

the Muslim war boats was the *lantaka*. Although small, the *lantaka* was versatile because it could be swiveled sideways as well as up and down.

As weapon of war, the *lantaka* were produced locally, procured from Brunei or acquired from the Dutch and the British. From the Spaniards and their allies, the Sulu warriors were also able to capture artillery pieces, such as reported in the following accounts:

"In 1627, a Sulu fleet composed of more than 30 *caracoas* and about two thousand men led by Rajah Bongsu attacked the new Spanish shipyard in Camarines...The Sulus captured artilleries, guns and ammunitions, iron and brass pieces (among others), which they needed badly." (Majul, 1973: 126)

For their part, the Spaniards had at times also launched successful expeditions against the inhabitants of Sulu. In one successful attack of a Sulu fort on January 1, 1638, the Spaniards were able to penetrate Sulu defenses after about 400 assaults and three months of fighting. On this occasion the Spaniards were able to capture several pieces of artillery "of English, Portuguese and Dutch manufacture.. It is interesting to point out that this siege of a Sulu Sultan's fort reveals the multi-ethnic origins of the defenders which include Tausug, Sama, Tagimaha from Basilan, Makassar (Indonesians) and other Malays." (ibid., 138)

Taming Baran (Suit of Body Armor)

The *taming baran* or suit of body armor, which is fashioned of plates of the *tanduk kabaw* (carabao horns) and fastened with lengths of brass wire, was used as defense against edge weapons such as *kalis* and *barung*. Its origin could not be ascertained. The form has similarity with those worn by the ancient Mongol or Chinese warriors. The local rendering of the *taming baran* shows reference to the use of local materials such as the *carabao* horn and local design such as the *ukkil* applied on some of its adornments.

Some *taming baran* are paired with *taming u* (helmet), which are also made from *carabao* horn or metal. There are samples in museums of complete set of body armor with helmet that are of Spanish or European style, but labeled as originating from Sulu. These could be "war trophies" acquired in battles by the Sulu combatants.

Produced locally, the seemingly controlled production of *taming baran* pieces could be due to the social stratification of Sulu society. It appears that only the *sultan*, *datu* and other members of the royalty, whose social rank is signified by the grand character of the *taming baran*, could wear the body armor as expression of their social rank or privilege status in the society. Another reason is the psychological reliance by the mass supporters or *tindug* or the Sultan on some kind of esoteric, rather than physical, means of defense in combat.

In Sulu, the *ilmu' pagkausug* (esoteric knowledge for combat) is believed and trusted in the battlefield, rather than on relying on some physical means of defense. The Tausug, in fact, have the notion of *lampik baran*, which literally means "body shield," but this is understood in the sense of "spiritual shield" or reliance on the believed esoteric means of "protection" in combat.

Today, the *taming baran* pieces printed on book pages or displayed in a number of museums continue to inspire the imagination of today's generation of young Tausug, and the Philippine Muslims in general, who take pride of their artistry and associated image of power.

In this Museum, the several pieces of *taming baran* on display project not only the martial character of the wearers but express their finer sensibility through the artistry and refined crafting of materials such as the tiny ring-like brass elements which are rhythmically linked or intertwined with one another to bind the hard *tanduk kabaw* or copper plates together. Each *taming baran* stands as symbol of elegance, nobility and power.

Pakukus or Hand Weapons

The various *pakukus* or hand weapons of the Sulu Muslims were products of the old "Malay forge" . By means of this traditional method, the Sulu blacksmiths have proudly produced the various hand weapons which include the *kalis*, *barung*, *budjak* and *taming*.

Kalis or Kris

In Sulu, one of the most treasured bladed weapons is the *kalis* or *kris*. The use and importance of *kalis* as a combat weapon is highlighted in the book appropriately titled "Swish of the Kris" (1936) by American military historian Vic Hurley who describes the *kris* " as one of the most terrible offensive weapons to be developed by man...the equal in every particular of the finest steel of Toledo and Damascus". (Hurley, 1936: 91)

There are three types of *kris* seen in Sulu. These are the *kalis tulid* with straight blade, the *kalis talo seko*, with three waves in the blade near the grip, and the *kalis seko* characterized by waves in the blade from hilt to tip. In all types of *kris*, the base of the blade widens into the elaborate guard which has a pattern of notches designed to catch the blade of the opponent. Some *kris* blades are engraved with *ukkil* and occasionally inlaid with gold or silver. The handle of the *kris* is made of hard wood adorned with metalwork or ivory.

Barung

Barung is a leaf-shaped blade unique to Sulu. Its short, wide and single-edged blade has a broad back and sharp point at the end. The weapon is used for close combat. It is heavy enough to be used for hacking, slashing and thrusting. More than the *kris*, the *barung* is the most favored weapon of a Tausug combatant.

As to its decoration, the handle of *barung* has alternating bands of cord and metal close to the blade, while the butt end is of polished wood. In the Smithsonian Museum, a *barung* with lavishly carved handle represents the finest example of Sulu sculpture.

Budjak and Taming

The people of Sulu also utilized *budjak* or spears with blades of brass, iron or steel. In combat some warriors brought a pair of spears -- one for launching at the enemy from a distance and the other for thrusting afterwards. For distance offensive work a small bamboo spear called *simbilan*, which has iron or fire hardened tip, is used. The dexterity with which this weapon is handled is amazing. As many as five spears could be hurled with one motion causing these to spread in their flight.

The Sulu warriors used also *taming* or shields for defense. There were many forms of Sulu shields compared to the Mindanao shields which were heavier. Most *taming* were made of wood and reinforced by hides.

Summing up: with the decorative *ukkil* and military artifacts constituting the bulk of the Sulu traditional visual arts, the embodiment of beauty and martial power together in such a space seems to project a contradiction of sort. Appreciated, however, in the proper Sulu cultural and historical contexts, these two art images together suggest the common pursuit of the people of Sulu for peace and freedom in the southern Philippines.

CONCLUSION

Through time, Lupah Sug or Sulu had carved for itself an honorable place in history. Several factors, such as geographical, economic, political and military, propelled it to acquire power for self-preservation and development. More than its physical power which had its ebb and tide, Sulu's real power lies in its unifying ideology which has been molded by the combined potencies of Islam and the *addat*, or indigenous beliefs -- a chemistry of ideals that many people of Sulu have imbibed deeply and utilized as source of confidence and

courage to deal with challenges that have come their way. Sulu people today in general, though stripped of material gains, are inwardly strong and inspired to pursue what is right and just.

In Sulu history, the resistance of the Sulu people against colonialism has been an expression of their determination to defend their homeland, religion and culture. The wars that they had to fight were not of their own making but were forced upon them by others. As well articulated by Najeeb Saleeby, "the Moro (particularly the Tausug) was not met except with the predetermination to fight him. He was not approached except with the intention of sharing his treasure. He was not invited except to surrender his right to government and no alternative was offered him except tribute or death. It is out of reason to expect such people to abandon their customs, traditions, government and religion without struggle. It is out of reason to expect them to yield to threats and be daunted by a bombshell shot from a distance. (Saleeby, 1963/1908:151-152)

Today, the people of Sulu proudly declare "We were never conquered!" Powerful invaders have never succeeded in breaking the spirit of these "People of the Path of Knowledge". Everyday they bow their forehead to the ground as gesture of surrender to God. They are proud of their past as they guard their traditions, treasure their cultural achievements and cherish their ideals and devotion to the Almighty.

Concretized in the visual arts, the ideals of the people of Sulu and their corresponding historical achievements have come to our day as source of Sulu people's pride, creativity and confidence. As testimonies of Sulu's power and just pursuit of Sulu people's rights and liberty, these artifacts serve, in the midst of the present volatile Mindanao situation, as reminders for the urgent need to institute genuine social justice as a requisite for lasting peace and progress in the southern Philippines.

On the larger global context, indigenous art and tradition, such as those of Sulu, help provide the shield to slow down, if not prevent, the rush of globalization from flattening our planet's diverse cultural terrain.

ABOUT THE PAPER

This paper is prepared as one of the four lectures on Sulu to be delivered by four Sulu scholars at the Yuchengco Museum on September 20, 2008, to mark the closing days of the exhibit titled "BEYOND THE CURRENTS: The Culture and Power of Sulu".

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