

## Looking Back on “The Sulu Zone”: State Formation, Slave Raiding and Ethnic Diversity in Southeast Asia

by James Francis Warren

### Introduction

My initial encounter with the Sulu Zone, located between the Asian mainland and the large islands of Mindanao, Borneo and Sulawesi, began twenty-eight years ago.<sup>1</sup> I first learned of the Sulu Archipelago and the maritime world of the Samal Bajau Laut when I received my Peace Corps posting in 1967, assigning me to Semporna, Sabah, on the east coast of Borneo. I lived for two years in Semporna (1967-69). The period from January to November, 1969, spent in Kampong Bangau<sup>2</sup>, a Samal Bajau Laut village comprising a flotilla of boat dwellers and a semi-sedentary population of Bajau Laut in varying stages of adaptation to a house dwelling way of life, was particularly memorable. It was the rapid abandonment of sea nomadism, a life-style which has characterised the Samal Bajau Laut as a people and from which they drew their sense of identity and purpose, that first motivated my interest in Southeast Asian History. The search for historical antecedents to contemporary social change among the Samal Bajau Laut, whose maritime nomadic culture was being inexorably extinguished by political and economic development, involved me in a study of the interaction between a relatively weak quasi-colonial agency, The North Borneo Chartered Company, and the maritime nomadic people of the northeast coast of Borneo between 1878 and 1909. Much of the research was performed during vacation periods while I served in Sabah as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Despite its limitations in wealth and power, the Chartered Company's administration presided over the emergence of a new social and political order at the beginning of the twentieth century. This transformation affected the Taosug of the Sulu Sultanate, the overlords of the coast in earlier periods; the Chinese, most of whom came to Semporna as a result of Chartered Company rule; and had an even more profound impact on the Samal Bajau Laut.<sup>2</sup>

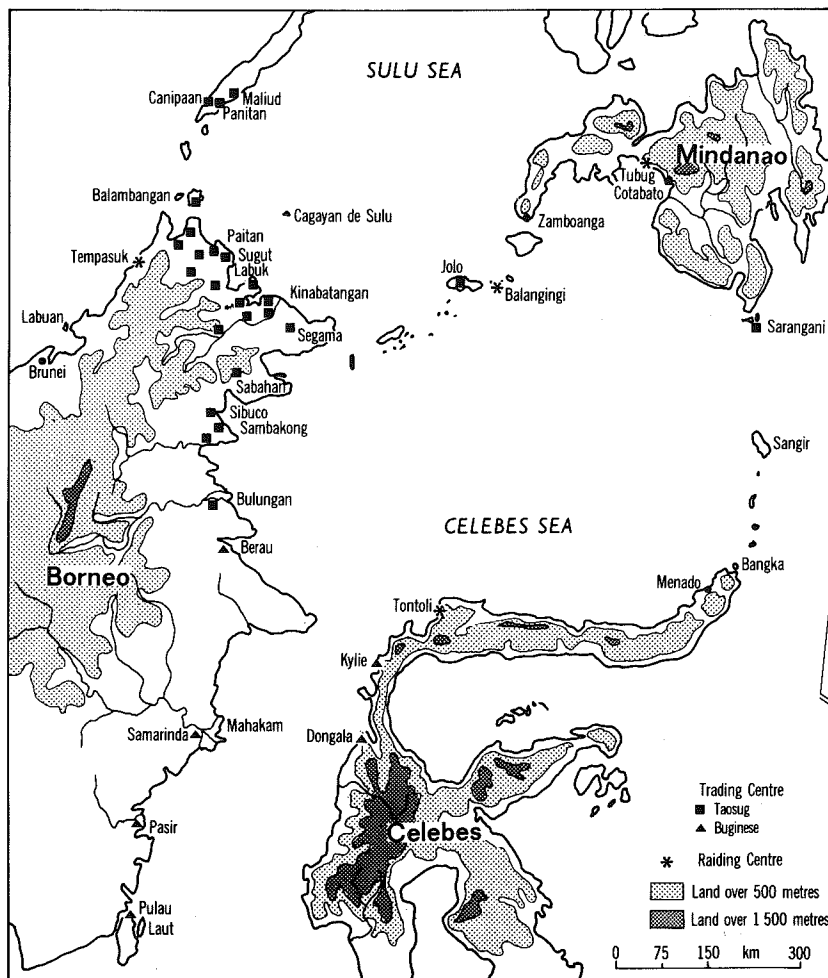
My experience of attempting to write my Master's thesis in 1970 on the Samal Bajau Laut under Chartered Company rule, a history involving a non-western marginalised people based primarily on written (British) records, highlighted the extreme difficulty of presenting a balanced interpretation, using only traditional historiographical methods. It impressed upon me the vital importance of oral traditions and an ethnohistorical methodology in any future effort to investigate historical changes in values, social organisation and political patterns of the maritime people of Southeast

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1 This paper was initially presented to the National Conference of the Japan Society for Southeast Asian History in June 1993. A revised version was delivered to the New Zealand Asian Studies Association Conference in July 1995.

2 See James Francis Warren, *The North Borneo Chartered Company's Administration of the Bajau, 1878-1909* (Athens: Southeast Asia Series, No. 22, Ohio University Press, 1971). On the radical nature of change experienced by the Samal Bajau Laut see Carol Warren, *Ideology, Identity and Change: The Experience of the Bajau Land of East Malaysia, 1969-1975* (Townsville: Southeast Asia Series, No. 14, James Cook University, 1983).

### The Sulu Zone



Map 1 The Sulu Zone

Asia.<sup>3</sup> There still remained the need then to attempt to integrate my small-scale investigation of displacement and cultural adaptation of the Samal Bajau Laut with the study of world historical events and experiences, and to show how they linked together. I also felt the necessity to expand the temporal reach of analysis in order to better understand the response of the Sulu world and the rest of eastern Indonesia to the ascendance of global capitalism, modernity and the colonial state.

Maritime trade and exchange has dominated island Southeast Asia for thousands of years. The peoples of the archipelago have long been locked into a web of exchange involving the exploitation of the rich tropical resources of the area, with producers, distributors and controllers involved in a complex set of relationships and structural dependency. Within the archipelago centres of distribution developed and, probably in association with the development of larger markets, capital flows and technology transfers in mainland Asia, trade increased and states were established in various port-entrepots. With the growing influence of India, and later China, the trading networks grew in scale and complexity and the fortunes of everyone involved in exchange and distribution became linked with the political and economic fortunes of the mainland states. So trade balances and growth rates and the power of states in the archipelago ebbed and flowed. The late arrival of predatory Europeans in Southeast Asia disrupted the regional agenda and established patterns of trade, particularly the spice trade, as the Portuguese, the Spanish and especially the Dutch attempted to monopolise both commodity production and distribution that was occurring all over Southeast Asia - in Malacca or the environs of Makassar, in Manila or the center of Java.<sup>4</sup>

With the re-emergence of political stability in Xing China in the late seventeenth century Chinese trade flourished again. Chinese demand for exotic products, often of little initial interest to Europeans encouraged both the re-establishment and 'take off' of regional exchange networks and the production of goods. In some areas the Dutch did attempt to control this determined expansive trade but with limited success. In Sulawesi they succeeded in bullying the Makassarese and Bugis into signing trade treaties, but these were easily circumvented. New entrepots emerged, especially in Borneo and in the Sulu Sea. The latter area was particularly well placed as a no-man's land wedged between competing Spanish and Dutch claims and ideally suited to receive the junk trade

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3 On the method and importance of a theoretically informed practise for 'doing ethnography' and 'history' see John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992) pp. 3-45; see also James Francis Warren, *At the Edge of Southeast Asian History* (Quezon City: New Day Press, 1987), pp. XIV-XVIII; 'Lives of the Ah Ku and Karayuki-san of Singapore: Sources, Method and Historian's Representation', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 26, No 2 (1992), pp. 1-16; 'A Strong Stomach and Flawed Material: Towards the Making of a Trilogy, Singapore, 1870-1940' *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1995), pp. 245-264.

4 On maritime trade and exchange in Southeast Asia see O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce. A Study of the Origins of Srivijaya* (Ithaca: New York, 1967); Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985); M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Commerce in the Indonesian Archipelago Between 1500 and 1630* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962); J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers (eds.) *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity Rise and Demise* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990); Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, Volume I: *The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988; Volume 2: *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

from China.<sup>5</sup> At the same time it was within easy reach of the exotic marine and forest products demanded by the traders and other agents of modernity. The island of Jolo became a major center for cross-cultural trade in Southeast Asian history and here the Sulu Sultanate developed and flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the stress Jacob Van Leur gave in the 1930s to illuminating the study of the region's numerous maritime traditions, few since then had looked beyond the European experience to the more expansive stream of Southeast Asian development.<sup>7</sup> The maritime populations that were dependent on the sea for their economic pursuits – trading, raiding, collecting and fishing – remained largely caricatures in the historiography of the region; their origins and development, relationships with each other, their loosely integrated regional political economies dominated by the institutions of slave raiding and cross-cultural trade, and their adjustment to external forces were largely written about from between 'insular blinkers'. I gradually realised, both from earlier personal experience and a reading of hitherto neglected historical records in Spain, the United States, the Philippines, the Netherlands and England, that the Samal Bajau Laut's marginalised view of Taosug or Sulu history and interpretation of past events, was a historical perspective from the very edge of a wide-ranging trading sphere that centred on the Sulu Sultanate. To be released from the conceptual constraints of conventional historical geography, I called this web of economic influence and interpersonal relations a 'Zone'. Following in the footsteps of Braudel, I abandoned the insular geographic perspective of earlier historians of the Philippines, Indonesia and Borneo, for a more dynamic definition of the Sulu Sultanate's boundaries based on larger scale processes of social change and a borderless history of a wide-ranging maritime trading network oriented toward China, Singapore and Europe. The inherent advantages of this theoretical approach in an upland-agricultural context were already apparent to me in E.R. Leach's pioneering work on the political systems of highland Burma.<sup>8</sup> In this

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- 5 See Leonard Blussé, 'Chinese Trade to Batavia during the days of the VOC', *Archipel*, Vol. 18, (1979), 195-214; *Strange Company – Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht: KITLV, 1985); Anthony Reid, 'The Unthreatening Alternative: Chinese Shipping in Southeast Asia, 1567-1842', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 27, Nos. 1 and 2 (1993) pp. 13-32; Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977); James Francis Warren, 'Sino-Sulu Trade in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 25 (1977), pp. 50-79.
- 6 See James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898 The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981).
- 7 For Jacob C. Van Leur's pioneering work on the trading world of Southeast Asia see, *Indonesian Trade and Society Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (Hague: Van Hoeve, 1967).
- 8 My initial thinking on how the late 18th century global economy and inter-regional cross-cultural trade created a 'borderless world' or 'zone', both geographically and historically, in the area of the Sulu and Celebes seas owes much to the influence of John Smal's thinking, who, in turn, had been strongly influenced by the hemispheric – cross-regional historical orientation of Marshall Hodgson. Templates for the study were provided by the seminal works of E.R. Leach and Fernand Braudel. See, E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1954); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* 2 Vols. (New York: Harper and Row: 1972); A recent invitation to write a paper for an international symposium, 'Southeast Asia: Global Area Studies for the 21st Century', organised by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, October 1996, has provided me with the opportunity to further elaborate my thinking on a number of key issues about writing the history of modern Southeast Asia. See, 'The Zulu Zone, The World Capitalist Economy and the Historical Imagination: Problematizing Global Cultural Interconnections and Interdependencies'.

context, Southeast Asia is a region in which the sea serves as the major means of communication for independent go-ahead states and the land forms the major impediment to it. It is often easier to sail considerable distances from one island to another, than to walk across the smallest island. Until recently dense rain forest and rugged mountains have provided a natural barrier behind which tribal populations have been able to preserve a remarkable degree of autonomy into the modern era. This autonomy should not mislead us though into assuming, on the one hand, a complete lack of contact between tribesmen and state systems, nor on the other, should extensive trade lead us into treating peripheral areas and states as belonging to a single, tightly integrated system. It is precisely the importance of cross cultural trade in the history of the Zone, associated with a pattern of predatory raiding, and mobile populations which has allowed the complex articulation of fundamentally diverse cultural and political systems.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Gibson stresses that violence and commodities are truly inter-cultural phenomena, which can have very different meanings for neighbouring populations, without for all that failing to exert decisive influences on the development of each trading or raiding partner.<sup>10</sup> This is a point I would like to return to shortly. Certainly, much of the history of 'the Sulu Zone' had to be rewritten making use of colonial records, ethnographic materials and comparative perspectives. I hoped these entangled sources, insights and approaches, especially an ethnohistorical perspective, would lead to a new level of historical analysis and synthesis in the study of Southeast Asian modern history.

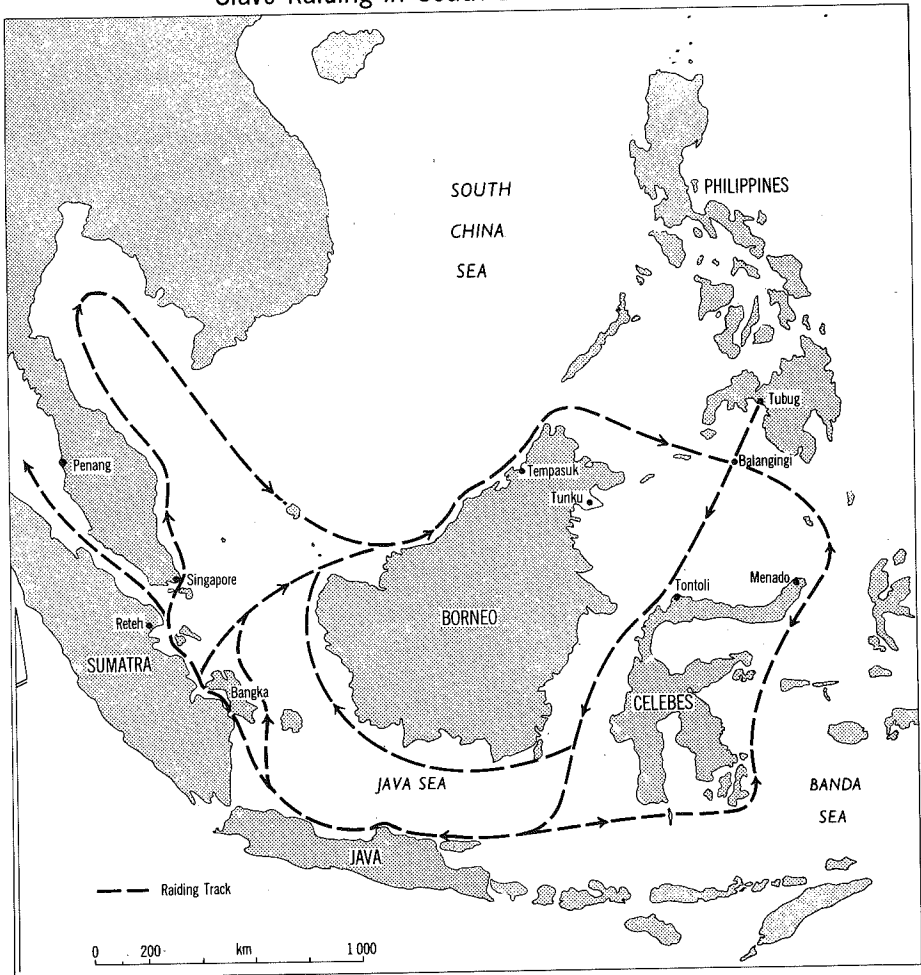
I found theorizing the Sulu Zone to provide an invaluable framework for thinking about complex socio-historical processes. By foregrounding the conceptual-theoretical importance of the 'Zone', (as Braudel had done in his masterpiece on the Mediterranean) I was able to place the various maritime peoples – the Taosug, Balangingi Samal, Samal Bajau Laut, Iranun, and Magindanao – in their proper socio-historical contexts and, in particular, examine and illuminate the larger ecological, economic and political processes of structural change in which they were embedded – the 'big changes' – and how they helped to fashion these changes. I began to understand for the first time the actual process by which maritime trading states evolved and single-mindedly expanded in Southeast Asia. By altering the spatial and temporal dimension, a far more comprehensive history of how a maritime 'frontier' region resisted and responded to the impact of global trade and western imperialism began to emerge. I had created a radically distinctive cultural-ecological 'framework' for re-interpreting and re-presenting the inter-regional history of a Malayo-Muslim Sultanate situated at the edges of the territorial boundaries of three colonial states. My attempt to experiment with such a different form of framing and contextual presentation enabled me to concentrate on the real historical complexities and connections to construct an autonomous angle of vision for interpreting Taosug society and culture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. This 'context' was both an essential and convenient point of departure, and, metaphor, to

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<sup>9</sup> On militarised trade diasporas see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp. 158-172; and, Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) pp. 158-194.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Gibson, 'Raiding, Trading and Tribal Autonomy in Insular Southeast Asia', a paper presented at the Conference on 'The Anthropology of War', sponsored by the Guggenheim Foundation, 24-28 March 1986, p. 2.

### Slave Raiding in South East Asia



Map 2 Slave raiding routes in Southeast Asia

explain complex conditions of cultural difference and diversity and processes of daily life and circumstance of maritime traders, marauders and fisher folk, and the nature of a slave system and the state and society that supported it.

Previous historical studies of the Sulu Sultanate depended largely on published colonial records and travel accounts to understand the economic and social roles played by slaves rather than on testimonies produced by the slaves themselves.<sup>11</sup> A unique alternative to this Eurocentric perspective was presented by the discovery of the scattered statements of the fugitive captives of the Sulu Sultanate – suppressed voices from the past - powerful echoes of marginalised speakers and a history of silence. From over one hundred and eighty fugitive slave accounts, manuscript sources and travel literature clear patterns of social life and economic activity could be reconstituted as part of the slaves' own histories, and as a testimony of what they were doing to the Sulu Zone. As an ethnohistorical source the published and unpublished accounts of the fugitive slaves of the Sulu Sultanate were invaluable. The statements told me much about the 'inside' experience of slavery in the Sulu Zone that could never be found in more traditional colonial texts and sources. Indeed, without them much of the de-centering view of everyday life in the Sultanate would have been lost. The experience of captives from the moment of their seizure, and their passage in the slave prahus, to their settlement, life and labour in Sulu emerged from anonymity in the slave testimonies. The total effect of these individual lives and cases of fugitive slaves was to throw very considerable light on the internal processes, the ethnic and social transformations, in the Sulu zone during the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Equally important, the possibility of historians engaging in field work akin to anthropologists seemed to me to be an exceptionally important consideration at that time. And it still is now. For example, the history of the Balangingi Samal and the Samal Bajau Laut had been clouded by confused ethnic distinctions, but more by the accepted myth that the Samal slave raiders were forced into piracy because European trade had largely destroyed the Malay maritime coastal economy. Had I not had an intimate working knowledge of the society and history of these maritime strand communities I would not have been in a position to expose the myth. Having discovered the astronomical size of the demand for marine products destined for Chinese markets in the Spanish archival sources, especially tripang (sea cucumber) and mother of pearl shell, I was immediately aware of how much Samal Bajau Laut labour would have been required to procure it, and that this was far in excess of the existing population. I was not able to visit the Balangingi Samal in the 1830s, but I was able to 'pass over' into a Samal Bajau Laut coastal village of the 1960s, to observe and experience at first hand the daily life and subsistence of these maritime people over an extended period of time. With such detailed knowledge came an intuition or 'feel' for the right questions to ask about old legends, earlier events and ethnic stereotypes, a cultural sensitivity to what did not sound right in the historical record, and an exceedingly powerful image of a people called the 'Balangingi Samal'.

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11 See Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973); Nicholas Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Ronald Moore, 1963); *Sulu and Sabah: A Study of British Policy towards the Philippines and North Borneo from the Late Eighteenth Century* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1978).

12 See Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898*, pp. 215-251.

## The 'History' and Argument

J.C. Van Leur, the Dutch sociological historian, 'warned against applying European categories to the description of Asian social and economic phenomena'. In attempting to re-interpret and re-present an 'inside view' of the Sulu Zone, I tried to avoid the Eurocentric, historically specific 'categories' of which Van Leur warned. The term 'piracy' was replaced by that of 'slave raiding', and slavery as an institution was defined in contrast to its western definitions. Careful examination of the inapplicability of certain western terminology and categories – 'piracy', 'slavery', and 'the state' – enabled me to analyse the economic and political dynamics of a Malayo-Muslim state and how it was effected by global trade, and the rapid advance of western imperialism and modernity. I was able to amply document the explosive development of the Sulu Sultanate during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a growth that was based upon a system of extracting forest and sea produce, by means of slave labour, for market place commerce with Canton. The labour was itself 'produced' by raiding the poorly defended populations of the Visayan Islands and Luzon and the coastal regions of eastern Indonesia. The social formation and prosperity of the Sulu Sultanate, as my account of its ethnohistory indicates, was based above all else on slaves. They were reported by travellers, traders and emissaries to be engaged in every conceivable domestic function, agricultural and industrial occupation. It was one of the primary roles of the Sulu state, within its larger trading zone, to maintain the material and social conditions for the recruitment and exploitation of slaves.

In the section of my book on marauding I refuted ideas current in popular tradition, centralised colonial authority and academic circles since the late eighteenth century, that slave raiding was a reflection of the economic decline and moral degeneracy of Malayo-Muslim maritime states like Sulu.<sup>13</sup> Until recently this notion of decay, shattered communities and barbarism was synonymous with a specific set of social-cultural representations and behaviour associated with ignorance, depravity and treachery and connoted an islamic people in the case of the Sulu Zone who were considered to be savages, pirates and slavers. Instead, I argued that slave raiding was integral to state formation. Political power was initially built on centralised control of an entrepot; as the power of the Sultanate increased so the ruling elite had to ensure their monopoly of redistribution by forcing market trade through their port and control production, which was exceedingly labour intensive. Raiding helped not only to enforce redistribution, but also supplied labour essential for the production of commercial goods. The raiding groups themselves often consisted of earlier captives or their descendants. Slaves were often incorporated into the dominant society. New cultural identities were forged. The 'pirates' developed some political coherence and autonomy articulated in social relations and political and economic practise which eventually threatened their erstwhile Taosug

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13 In these Euro-centered histories, which dwell on the activity of the Iranun and Balangingi at length, the term "piracy" is conspicuously present in the titles: Vicente Barrantes, *Guerras Piraticas de Filipinas contra Mindanaos y Joloanos* (Madrid, 1878); Emilio Bernaldez, *Resana Historica de la Guerra a Sur de Filipinas, sostenida por las armas Espanoles contra los piratas de aquel Archipiélago, desde la conquista hasta nuestras dias* (Madrid, 1857); Jose Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la Pirateria Malayo Mahometana en Mindanao, Jolo y Borneo* (Madrid, 1882); Nicholas Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1963).



masters and the Sultanate. Cross-cultural trade, raiding and slavery were all parts of the process of state formation in the Sulu Zone. Consequently, by the advent of the nineteenth century, slavery and slave raiding were fundamental to the state. The Taosug aristocracy depended for its prosperity on the labour of slaves and sea raiders, who fished for tripang, secured pearls, and manned the fleets. Marauding became the exclusive vocation of the Samal-speakers of Balangingi as they combined their activities with certain Iranun communities from the north coast of Jolo and Mindanao. The raiding system enabled the Sultanate, in the midst of widespread economic and social change to incorporate vast numbers of peoples from the Philippines and Eastern Indonesia into the population. From the point of view of Philippine history and the larger history of island Southeast Asia, it is important to understand the genesis of this particular ethnic group; to know that the infamous reputation Sulu acquired for slave mongering in the nineteenth century is attributable to the activities of the Balangingi, an 'emergent society' largely composed of Filipino captives and their descendants who were brought to the Sulu Zone and in many cases assimilated within a single generation to become the predators of their own people.<sup>14</sup> In 'closed' slave systems in mainland kingdoms such as Angkor, Pagan and Ayudha and among stratified tribes, such as the Toba Batak, Kenyah and Toraja, ethnicity was not a critical integrating concept in the enslavement process of those societies and cultures.<sup>15</sup> However, I have demonstrated that in 'open' systems such as in Sulu, slavery and ethnicity had become mutually reinforcing. Slavery and dependent labour were not solely economic institutions which enabled the late eighteenth century expansion of the Sulu state and domination of the regional trade network; slavery and the accomplishment of ethnicity had virtually become the very basis of organised society in the Sultanate.

The problem of ethnic identification is an important but until recently neglected theme in Southeast Asian history. Historians of the region are indebted to Leach, Lehman, and Moerman for their pioneering work on the nature and history of upland societies in Southeast Asia. In *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Leach demonstrates that culture and ethnic identity are not necessarily synonymous. He points out that the process of identification among tribal people like the Kachin is never simple; it entails migration, intermarriage, barter trade relations, warfare, inter-penetrating political systems, and values and beliefs shared with non-Kachin. Manifest in the work of all these anthropologists is a conscious effort to define the nature of social categories applied to ethnic groups in Southeast Asia across time. Their work has led to a more

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14 See Jim Warren, 'Who were the Balangingi Samal? Slave Raiding and Ethnogenesis in Nineteenth Century Sulu', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1978) pp. 477-490.

15 Southeast Asian slavery was marked by 'closed' and 'open' kinship systems. A 'closed' system is oriented primarily towards retaining the labour of slaves by reinforcing their distinctiveness, as 'outsiders', from the dominant population. In Southeast Asia this pattern occurred primarily in wet-rice growing, labor intensive Indianized kingdoms and kinship-oriented stateless societies, where commercial exchange and a money economy had made little impact. In Southeast Asian societies where various forms of dependent labour were common, individuals did not emphasize the route taken to 'slavery' unless this corresponded with the critically important legal-social distinction in 'open' and 'closed' systems between being an 'insider' or 'outsider'. See James L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) pp. 6-7, 9-13; Anthony Reid (ed.) *Slavery Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983) pp. 156-181.

complete understanding of the nature of ethnic groups and the processes responsible for “accomplishing ethnicity” among upland peoples in Southeast Asia.<sup>16</sup>

These studies reveal more of the Southeast Asian past than was thought possible a generation ago, but our understanding of the development of the present extraordinary ethnic diversity of insular Southeast Asia still remains far from perfect. Historians of island Southeast Asia in particular have been generally inclined to accept “ethnicity” as a fixed premise. Such formulation has hindered necessary reappraisal of available evidence on the nature and history of particular “societies”. An outstanding example of this is the case of the Balangingi Samal, a little-known but important population group in the nineteenth-century island world. Before the beginning of that century, the Balangingi Samal did not exist. Yet by the 1830s, Balangingi Samal slave-raiding activities, which were an important component of the wider island economy of the Sulu Sultanate, had made them a group renowned and feared throughout Southeast Asia.<sup>17</sup> Slave raiding, or what the Spanish, Dutch and British called piracy, was no longer a manifestation of decay and dependence but rather the result of phenomenal economic growth and strength. It was part of a vital effort to partake in and control a rapidly increasing volume of commerce caused by the advent of the Europeans in the China trade in the late eighteenth century.

Not surprisingly, debt bondage as an economic institution was most fully developed in Southeast Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century as global trade and monetisation affected local social systems and regional trade networks, and because the very survival of slavery in different parts of Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in the world, was being called into question. The main slave raiding zones in the South China sea and the waters of Eastern Indonesia and the Philippines attracted the intense naval pressure of Britain, Spain and the Netherlands for more than a quarter of a century; by the 1880s, the number of slaves moving across the region had been reduced to a trickle. The abolition of slave traffic in Southeast Asia was a mortal blow to the economies of states like Sulu. When aristocratic Taosug in Sulu and others could no longer rely on long distance maritime raids to supply sufficient numbers of slaves for their needs, the amount of tribute ordinarily collected from dependents increased dramatically, and fines in the various local legal codes became far more prohibitive. Traditional states

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- 16 See E.R. Leach, *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London: London School of Economics, 1954) and ‘The Frontiers of Burma’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, III, I (1960), pp. 49-68; F.K. Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, Studies of Anthropology, No. 3, 1963) and ‘Ethnic Categories in Burma and the Theory of Social Systems’ in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations*, ed. P. Kunstadter, I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); pp. 93-124; M. Moerman, ‘Who Are the Lue?’, *American Anthropologist*, LXVII (1965), pp. 1215-230 and ‘Accomplishing Ethnicity’ in *Ethnomethodology*, ed. R. Turner (London: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 54-68. For general articles relating to the genesis and persistence of ethnic boundaries, the incorporation of ethnic groups, and the organization of interethnic relations in polyethnic social systems, see *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. F. Barth (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), and *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies*, ed. L.A. Despres (the Hague: Mouton, 1975).
- 17 Margarita De Los Reyes Cojuangco has attempted to reconstruct the history of the Samal Balangingi diaspora spanning four generations of exiles in the aftermath of the decisive battle of Balangingi in 1848. Particularly valuable is the biographical sketch of Panglina Taupan, the revered and feared Samal Balangingi leader, which is set out in a total context and carefully analysed for its historical and cultural meaning. See Margarita De Los Reyes Cojuangco, *Kris of Valor The Samal Balangingi Defiance and Diaspora* (Manila: Manison Press, 1993).

recognised, with able bodied replacements becoming scarce, that they derived their greatest advantage from extending various systems of bondage and dependent labour. The bonded could be given away as gifts, donations, tribute, security for a loan, sold or inherited. Indeed, forced sales into 'slavery' and bondage to ensure survival rose in the second half of the nineteenth century as the autonomy of traditional states and slave raiding both declined under the combined pressure of modern colonial navies. Interestingly, in terms of social values and everyday life, anthropological investigations of the heritage of 'slaves' from the nineteenth century onward, conclude that descendants of ex-bondsmen and other marginalised peoples are still suffering from the effects of centuries of bondage in various parts of Southeast Asia. By tracing the changing global, regional and local trade patterns of the Sulu Sultanate, the interaction between the Sultanate and powerful colonial powers, the rivalry between the Sultanate and the neighbouring Sultanates of Brunei and Mindanao, and finally the relationship of slave raiding and slavery to these phenomena and events conclusions were reached on three basic issues: first, the causality of seasonal long-distance maritime raiding; second, the causality of general social transformation; and finally, the process of accomplishing ethnicity, of which an accurate understanding required a diachronic, ecological perspective.

### **Raiding, Trading and Tribal Autonomy**

Let me return now for a brief moment to Highland Southeast Asia. In *The Sulu Zone*, I stressed that domination involved control over the productive and reproductive power of human beings rather than over land as in Europe. The manipulation of ethnically diverse groups was crucial in this process. I compared the shifts of ethnic diversity in island Southeast Asia with the persistence of ethnic distinctiveness in parts of mainland Southeast Asia. But the mainland groups, situated predominantly in the highland areas, have developed and elaborated ethnic distinctiveness in response to very different forces. Ethnic diversity is in part a response to the homogenising advances of lowland states, which, unlike their island counterparts, could often enforce their power within their domains. The highlands tribal peoples resisted incorporation into the larger traditions of lowland modernising states by rejecting cultural assimilation through ethnic differentiation and by deliberately living on the edge of the periphery of these states.<sup>18</sup> The island states, like Sulu, could not assimilate a wide variety of societies beyond the boundaries of their own trading ports and the client ethnic groups which did emerge across the Zone from the steam roller expansion of cross-cultural market place commerce and slave raiding, maintained their independence and cultural distinctiveness. However, with respect to the development of ethnic inter-relations, indigenous markets and regional commerce, it must also be appreciated that marauding and cross-cultural trade were not always maritime-coastal. Slave raiding also extended over land in the interiors of the large islands of Borneo, Sulawesi and Luzon. In this context slave raiding and warfare provides insights into the pioneering migrations, life ways and world views of vigorous proud tribal peoples, who were slash-burn agriculturalists and ardent

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<sup>18</sup> See Victor Lieberman, 'An Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia? Problems of Regional Coherence – A Review Article', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (1995) pp. 796-807.

head-hunters, like the Kenyah, Toraja and Igorot. Violent raiding, coerced trade for jungle products and debt bondage are all problematic areas with respect to tribal autonomy to which some sort of response is required by their insertion in the regional global political economy. Historically, tribal groups which failed to develop appropriate responses and ideologies were either absorbed into lowland states or eliminated. There remains an urgent need to understand and theorise the interaction of highland and tribal societies with autonomous ideologies and value systems in common regional economies, who are facing the onslaught of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

In a very real sense, I questioned the boundedness of universes of cultural meaning in *The Sulu Zone*. Critiques of the traditional anthropological/ historical view of the non-western world as composed of discrete, bounded, 'organic societies' each governed by its own integrated 'culture', have come partly from scholars such as Wolf, Friedman and Tsing examining the world system in terms of historical political economy, cultural studies and feminism.<sup>20</sup> As Roger Keesing has noted, the picture being opened up by modern archeology, ethnohistory and world systems theory is of regional systems with highly permeable boundaries between language groups. The 'tribes' of Africa and ethno-linguistic groups of mainland and insular Southeast Asia seem to have been fluid, with regional trade systems, a flow of objects, commodities and ideas, and unstable and contextually shifting boundaries.<sup>21</sup> According to Clifford Geertz, such peoples were in fact 'products' of large scale processes of global social change which had made them what they were and continued to make them what they would become in reaction to the uncontrollable and rapid impact of these forces.<sup>22</sup> Interpenetrating political and ritual structures and processes, cross-cutting allegiances and situationally crystallised identities transcended the margins of societies. Cross-cultural trade and later colonial-capitalism and modernity, drastically transformed 'cultural' boundaries, with colonial states freezing this dynamic process of flux into stable administrative units and disrupting or destroying old regional systems of trade, ritual and politics.

Future research trends should take account of both the extension of colonial capitalism and shifts in the international economy that made the slave trade and the accomplishment of ethnicity the heart of the political economy of particular states and

19 See, Thomas Gibson, 'Raiding, Trading and Tribal Autonomy in Insular Southeast Asia', paper presented at the conference on 'The Anthropology of War', sponsored by the Guggenheim Foundation, 24-28 March, 1986; Christopher Healy, 'Tribes and States In "Pre-Colonial" Borneo: Structural Contradictions and the Generation of Piracy', *Social Analysis*, No. 18 (1985), pp. 3-39; Robert L. Winzeler, 'Ecology, Culture, Social Organisation, and State Formation in Southeast Asia', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1976) pp. 623-640.

20 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Jonathan Friedman, 'Tribes, States and Transformation' in Maurice Bloch (ed.) *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology* (Association of Social Anthropologist, Studies No. 2. London: Malaby Press, 1975) pp. 161-202; *System, Structure and Contradiction: The Evolution of 'Asiatic' Social Formations* (Social Studies in Oceania and Southeast Asia, No. 2. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark, 1979); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen Marginality in an Out-of-the-way Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

21 Roger M. Keesing 'Asian Cultures?' *Asian Studies Review*. Vol. 15, No. 2 (1991), pp. 43-50.

22 See Clifford Geertz's review of Tsing's book, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*. 'Life on the Edge', *The New York Review*, April 4, 1994, pp. 3-4.

colonial cities from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, virtually nothing is known about where the slaves came from in Southeast Asia, nor how, for example the trade of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries differed from earlier centuries. There are also few rounded portraits of life within the interstices of particular slave cultures and marginal societies. Whereas, the final decades of the nineteenth century offer an important field of work on links between abolition and emancipation, the rise of peasant and plantation forms of monoculture, and forced and contract labour, as a dominant productive system in colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asia.

In conclusion then the implications of my analysis of the Sulu Zone perhaps, could be applied in a wider framework not only to elucidate the development of states and the elaboration of ethnic diversity in insular Southeast Asia, but also to develop a comparative framework with mainland states and cultures. The implications of such analysis could also be applied to a wider time frame, as my model and method could possibly be used to reconsider the earlier history and even pre-history of the island world. In the end, perhaps, such comparisons and concepts could challenge many of the accepted models of the origin of the state, dependent as they are on examples drawn from mainland cultures where control over ethnic groups and boundaries – the forces of production – were much more profound than they were in the Sulu Zone, or other parts of island Southeast Asia.