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TRANSFORMING WESTERN DEMOCRACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE CASE OF LANAO DEL SUR, THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

The question “why transplanted Western democracy in Southeast Asia could not thrive as intended” has yet to be answered. A possible answer to the question could be found in the dynamics of cultural encounter between the traditional Southeast Asian society and Western democracy. The case of the Muslim province of Lanao del Sur in the Philippines provides us an understanding how Western democratic institutions were translated and localised. The adaptation of Western democracy meant to restructure the political boundaries and especially for the Muslim Maranao to integrate into the bigger Christian dominated polity. Although the system of authority changed from the traditional to the so-called legal one, the traditional conception of social relations and authority still shape the Maranao politics. Western democratic institutions are observed only superficially. And the transformed Western democracy caused conflicts and armed struggle among the locals.

Keywords: The Philippines, Maranao politics, western democracy, localisation of democracy, hybridisation of democracy

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asian countries, save for Thailand, experienced long periods of Western colonisation. During these times, various aspects of Western ideology

and institutions such as individualism, capitalism and the rule of law were applied in the region. These became the bedrock for the modern political system of democracy, which began expanding in some Southeast Asian countries after achieving independence from the colonial rule. In the case of the Philippines, however, the Americans, who took over the Philippines from the Spanish in 1898, tried to transplant democracy through education and political tutelage during its occupation of the islands. It was only during the American colonial period that the entire Philippine archipelago came into being as one entity. During the Spanish colonial period of 1565 to 1898, the Muslim society in the Philippine Mindanao islands was not entirely subjugated. The ceaseless military campaign to conquer Muslim communities made the region isolated from the outside world for centuries. When the Americans came to control the area, the Muslims were seen to have been able to maintain and safeguard its old traditions, which were little tainted by Western influences. Philippine Muslim society then provides a valuable case where the dynamics of cultural encounter between the traditional Southeast Asian society and Western democracy may be observed. This study aims to understand how Western democratic institutions were translated and localised in a Muslim province of the Philippines, and focuses specifically on the province of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao.

The Muslims in the Philippines are composed of several ethno-linguistic groups or societies, which greatly differ from each other in history, culture, and language. Local peoples in the region used ethnic designators, such as Tausug, Magindanao, and Maranao to label themselves (Tan 1984: 12). Unlike the other two major ethnic groups, the Maranao of Lanao have not reached the degree of political centralisation by a strong sultanate. Their proximity to the lake gives them their name Maranao, which means “lake dwellers” or people residing in or within the vicinity of the lake (Barcenas 2000: 128). The Maranao pre-Islamic tradition is believed to be similar to the general model of Philippine society, the *barangay* system (Mednick 1975: 363; Saber 1967: 67). Earlier writers appropriately described Lanao as “the land of 1001 sultans and datus” for depending on the specific structural level one refers to, one does come up with countless sultans or datus (Baradas 1973: 278).

Today, the home province of the ethnic Maranao is Lanao del Sur, which is part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) of the Philippines. Lanao del Sur has a population of 1,045,429 (2015 census) and consists of 1,159 barangays, 39 municipalities, and 1 component city, the Islamic City of Marawi, the provincial capital. Lanao del Sur is known as the poorest province of the whole country, which also has the highest prevalence

cases of *rido* (clan conflict) (Adam and Boer 2015: 12, 18). As a province of the Philippines, Lanao del Sur follows the democratic system of governance, and merits our examination, in order to understand the hybrid characteristics of democracy in the contemporary Southeast Asia.

In known literatures of Southeast Asian studies, the traditional polity of Southeast Asia has been described by way of concepts such as the mandala (Wolters 1982), galactic polity (Tambiah 1976), and the *negara* (Geertz 1980). The fluid network or alliance system among semi-autonomous localities was a common feature of the polity, roughly based on Hindu cosmology. The state functions as a ruling body quite different from the old Chinese or Western kingdoms which control peoples and territories through a centralised government. In *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (1980), Geertz argues that the *Negara* was not a mechanism for extracting surpluses from the peasantry nor an administrative tool for the coercive execution of policy, but a continuing tableau vivant of Bali's cosmologically-based conceptions of hierarchy. He also concludes that this model may be extended to most of the "Indic" states of ancient Southeast Asia and provides an essential corrective to the overly coercive-administrative view of the state dominant in Western political theory since the 16th century. Even though Islam has been a dominant religion among the Maranao since its coming to the region in the 17th century, the type of Maranao polity was closer to Geertz' *Negara* than that of Arabian sultanate.

There are a number of studies about the changes of Philippine political system after the imposition of Western democratic institutions. For a broad perspective, Hutchcroft's *Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords: Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the American Philippines, 1900–1913* (2000) explains the state characteristics that American colonisers introduced in the Philippines. He argues that American colonisers tried to obtain the support of the local elites rather than to implement a reform program without their help. This policy orientation was executed through extensive systems of patronage, and resulted in promoting local autonomy at the expense of central authority. A study of the early Philippine elections by Lande and Cigler, *Competition and Turnover in Philippine Congressional Elections, 1907–1969* (1979), reveals that the Philippine election as the most important democratic institution modelled after the American system. However, it employed informal political structures and responded to voter behaviour in a manner fundamentally different from that of the Americans. The above mentioned two studies attest that the Western democratic system was suited to local conditions for the convenience of the colonial administration.

In Lanao local context, and with consideration of modernisation theory, Saber deals with the issue of the contrasting traditional and modern authority systems in his dissertation *The Transition from a Traditional to a Legal Authority System: A Philippine Case* (1967). He provides a complete picture of the transformation of traditional authority to legal authority in the Maranao society. He argues that the notion of “transition” does not mean a complete change of the traditional authority system. In practice, traditional authorities and legal laws are seen as moving toward the integration of some of their elements to provide a new pattern of normative control. However, he also admits that modern authority increasingly gains wider internal ground in the changing social system of the Maranao, and it coincides with the level of urbanisation. Two studies, Mednick’s *Sultans and Mayors: The Relation of a National to an Indigenous Political System* (1975) and Warriner’s *Traditional Authority and the Modern State: The Case of the Maranao* (1975) explain how traditional elites reestablish political status and exploit new institutions. Mednick argues that the national political system is not in conflict with the indigenous system because, on the local level, the roles of mayors and sultans are largely compatible. The practice of universal suffrage calls into being a new powerful figure, the sultan-mayor who possesses both traditional and modern sources of power. Meanwhile, Warriner’s study reveals how locals exploit newly-introduced modern institutions for preserving traditional powers and relationships. The aforementioned three studies are relevant in understanding the current practice of democratic institutions in Maranao society. The authors, however, only described the outward changes, and not the growing conflicting elements from within. The armed rebellion emerging from discrimination and marginalisation define anti-Westernisation movements and prove the failure of the Western democratic system in the region.

A recent study by Adam and Boer, *Conflict Mediation and Traditional Authority in the Province of Lanao del Sur, Mindanao* (2015), suggests the positive role of traditional authority in solving local conflicts. Adam and Boer argue that in Lanao del Sur, formal state structures are mediated through kin-based institutions, hereby shaping specific hybrid institutions. However, they argue, these hybrid institutions or other informal forms of public authority are not necessarily perceived as something problematic, but more pragmatic. The main advantage of these hybrid institutions is that they have historically and organically grown and therefore have strong social embeddedness, thereby generating a sense of continuity, trust, and order. Adam and Boer’s study simply confirms some institutionalists’ arguments, like institutional “recombination” by Scott (2001) and the “path-dependence” of institutional change by North

(1990), and prescribes the positive role of traditional elements for solving the persisting social conflicts.

Today, the question why transplanted Western democracy in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, could not thrive as intended, still remains. It may be an exaggeration to say that there has been no changes in the Philippine and Maranao democracy ever since its introduction. The collection of articles on the Philippines edited by Yuko Kasuya and Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *The Politics of Change in the Philippines* (2010), attests that the accumulated political experience and the socio-economic changes gradually impact the various aspects of the Philippine democracy. However, the popular labels for Philippine democracy such as “cacique democracy” (Anderson 1988), “electoral democracy” (Diamond 2002), “low quality democracy” (Case 1998), and “low intensity democracy” (Gills and Rocamora 1992) are still relevant. Major keywords in articulating Philippine politics include “patron-client,” “bossism,” “horse trade,” etc., quite different from conventional Western democracy. The case of Lanao del Sur may not be representative of the current status of Southeast Asian democracy, but it could provide a new angle in understanding how Western democracy was adapted and practiced in the cultural context of Southeast Asia.

As a modern political system, the representative democracy was born and evolved in the course of struggle over the sovereign power between the autocratic king and the people in the Western civilisation, especially in the UK, France, and the US. After defeating the absolute power of the king, the people began to concern about the representation of the people and the prevention of the rise of any absolute power. These concerns have translated into the Western democratic principles and institutions such as civil rights, election and the rule of law. Although no clear consensus on the definition of democracy exists yet, some characteristics such as legal equality, political freedom and the rule of law have been identified as the indispensable elements (O’Donnell 2005). Larry Diamond (2009) defined democracy in two ways, “Thin” democracy as a procedural definition and “Thick” democracy as a substantive definition. “Thin” democracy is, basically, based on the conduct of elections. “Thick” democracy is elections plus other elements such as the various spheres of freedom and rule of law as well as a vibrant civil society. Diamond assumes that thick democracy is the logical and preferred outcome of thin democracy. The thick democracy could be the ideal type of Western “liberal” democracy, and according to Youngs (2015), it is a goal to achieve by the democrats in all regions of the world.

However, due to the analytical difficulties of substantive democracy, scholars tend to give more emphasis on the procedural definition of democracy (Huntington 1991; Schumpeter 1942). The periodic conduct of free elections became the most important criterion to judge whether a political system is democracy or non-democracy. Such minimum definition of democracy caused the emergence of various types of democracy aside from Western “liberal” democracy. As an example, scholars called the unique characteristics of Asian democracy as “Asian-style or Asian Model of democracy” (Benjamin 2007; Hewison 1999; Neher 1994). Even though many Asian countries adopt the basic institutions of Western democracy, the way of conducting them is different depending on their own standpoints. A number of reasons has been applied to explain why the differences occur.

In this study, two most important elements of Western democracy—election and the rule of law—were taken into account to explain the Maranao style of democracy. Election as a means to create a legal authority is an indispensable element in a democratic system. And the rule of law is related to the state capability to control the social issues, which is not only to keep the society safe, but also to make possible elections free and fair and to set the constitutional limit of the elected power (Maravall and Przeworski 2003). Any types of political system without these two elements could not claim to be a democracy. Apparently transplanting democracy means the introduction of these two institutions to a non-democratic society.

The analysis in this study mainly relied on existing documents and publications, as well as extensive interviews with people from the locality. The interviews were conducted during several field researches in Lanao del Sur and Manila from 2013 to 2016. The interviewees constitute various individuals, including intellectuals, politicians, *datus* and *sultans*, etc. The following section, Section Two, covers the historical background of the province of Lanao del Sur. Meanwhile, Section Three deals with the transformation of Western democratic institutions in Lanao del Sur and analyses the electoral practices and adherence to the rule of law. The last section offers a summary and conclusion.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROVINCE OF LANA DEL SUR

The political set-up of the pre-Islamic Philippines was based on the *barangay* system or *datship*. *Datship* was somewhat feudal-type of social organisation

where members were related to one another by kinship rather than political and economic ties. The different datuships, therefore, maintained political independence, although interdependence existed among them because of internal trade and necessary alliances against common enemies (Abdulrachman and Makol 2013: 25). The coming of Islam brought a new political institution, the sultanate. According to Filipino historian Cesar Majul, the Philippines began to adopt Islam in the early 14th century, with the Maranaos becoming Islamised in the early 17th century (Majul 1971: 56–78).

The introduction of the sultanate hastened the state process by providing a super-structure over the scattered datuships. This was true for Sulu and Magindanao area,¹ but not Lanao. The system of sultanate in Lanao thrived alongside pre-Islamic social structure. The differences could be noted by way of topography. The Lanao region embraced Lake Lanao, which irrigates rich rice paddy land around it, and is surrounded by fertile upland areas. Such topography provides reliable subsistence and refuge from domination. Lake Lanao itself allows free movement in all boundaries, which makes political and economic dominance quite impossible (Bentley 1984: 651). Maranao polity resembled commonly found elements in traditional Southeast Asia. It is characterised by kinship ties of collectivism; sports a hierarchical structure, though not bureaucratic but consultative; is led by “big men”; has a mandala-style government where chiefs dominate the less powerful, among others (Abdulrachman and Makol 2013: 24).

The traditional Maranao society as a whole is called *pat a pengampong* (state), and it divided territorially four *sub-pengampongs* (sub-states), namely Bayabao, Masiu, Unayan, and Baloi. In terms of governing structure, the four *sub-pengampongs* are coequal in power and prestige. They are bound together in a sort of confederation or alliance, governed by an ancient order or law defining the relationship among communities and their members. The four *sub-pengampongs* have their own sub-units of *suko* (district), *inged* (township), and *agama* (village community). Each level of organisation from a *sub-pengampong* to an *agama* is governed by a *pelokelokesen* (council of elders), representing the interests of people. The elders who enforce authority function as a group with a not so clearly delineated executive, legislative, and judicial authorities. In general, interpersonal and interpositional connections or relations operate in different situations (Saber 1967: 72, 178).

Today, the four *sub-pengampongs* consists of 9 *suko* and 43 *inged*. According to Jamel Cayamodin, it is at the *inged* level where one can find political units with inheritable titles such as datu and sultan, etc. There are two categorical rankings of *inged*—the *pegawidan* (supported or superordinate),

of which there are 15 sultans; and the *pegawid* (supporting or subordinate), of which there are 28 sultans (Cayamodin 2013: 80). The *ingod* is further subdivided into sectors, called *agama*,² and again into *bangon*, the level of significant kin interaction (Baradas 1973: 275). According to Samuel Tan, the social organisation of Filipino Muslim societies was non-Islamic and followed the matrix of social organisations throughout the Philippine archipelago. It was also established in insular Southeast Asia but not in the rest of the Islamic world (Tan 1984: 11).

The authority system of traditional Maranao society is based on titular succession. If a datu or sultan dies, the members of one *bangensa* (community) would hold consultations to determine the legitimate successor to the throne (Cayamodin 2007: 75). The succession issue is one of the most frequent reasons for the clan conflicts, or the so-called *rido* (Adam and Boer 2015). The immediate kin group's active role and interest in supporting the claimant rest on the fact that they too would benefit immensely when a member of the clan acquires the title. The individual's validated rank, evidenced by the holding of a title, affects the ranks of all his relatives, as this shapes the way they are to be perceived by the rest of the villagers (Baradas 1973: 277).

When it comes to the rule of law, traditional Maranao relied on indigenous law such as *taritib* and *igma*, as well as Islamic Law. According to Moctar Matuan, the indigenous laws are themselves continuously influenced by Islamic Law. In fact, the word *taritib* and *igma* are said to have been adopted from two original Arabic terms: *tartib* and *ijma*. The former means arrangement or order while the latter refers to the consensus of jurists about a question of law at a particular point in history (Matuan 2007: 73).

Traditional Maranao society began to change under the American colonial rule, brought about by the Treaty of Paris of 1898. During the entire period of Spanish colonial rule, traditional Maranao society was relatively independent and isolated from the rest of the Philippines due to the sustained armed struggle against the Spanish (Benitez 1969: 10). The American military campaigns in Lanao began in 1903 and extended to 1906. The organisation of the Moro Province in 1903 was the first step to instituting American sovereignty in the Muslim world (Tan 1984: 67).

Political, social, and economic changes began in Lanao. Provincial and district institutions were created and the public school system was introduced; an American-inspired judicial system was put up alongside the imposition of the *cedula* (head tax). Christians were encouraged to migrate to Muslim lands and slavery was abolished (Che Man 1990: 23, 47). The new administrative structure, with its national, provincial, city, municipality, and barrio units,

superimposed upon the social and territorial jurisdiction of the *pengampong*. The municipal board is responsible to the provincial board, and the mayor is responsible to the provincial governor. This hierarchical system of authority is different from that of the one followed by the “elders” who were not answerable to any superior external authority and non-existing central authority of the *Pangampong* (Benitez 1969: 14; Saber 1967: 102).

Under the colonial governmental organisation, the Department of Mindanao and Sulu replaced the special military administration of the Moro Province in 1914. It was again replaced by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in 1916, through the enforcement of the Jones Law.³ The Bureau was abolished in 1930, and was replaced by the Commission for Mindanao and Sulu, as provided for in Commonwealth Act No. 75. It was an advisory agency to the national government, which dealt with the direct management of Muslim affairs under the Commonwealth (1935–1946)⁴ (Barcenas 2000: 139; Saber 1967: 76).

The policies adopted by the Commonwealth government included features which adversely affected the traditional authority system of the Maranao. For one, the government refused to recognise traditional titles. The policy of non-recognition of traditional authority was expressed in a memorandum by President Manuel L. Quezon, where he underscored the weakness in the policy adopted by the government in recognising *datus* by making them *ex-officio* officials of the government. This policy, according to Quezon, must be stopped and changed radically as it gives the impression that there is a dual government. Quezon instructed governors and municipal presidents in the provinces, under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu, to deal directly with the people instead of with *datus*, settlers, leaders, or *caciques* (Barcenas 2000: 139).

Under the independent Philippine administrative structure, the ethnic Maranao predominantly inhabit the province of Lanao del Sur and some parts of its neighbouring provinces. The provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte were established in 1959 by way of Republic Act No. 2228. Marawi was designated as the capital of Lanao del Sur. The city was renamed the “Islamic City of Marawi” in 1980. By implementing the 1987 Philippine Constitutional provision (Art. 10, Sec. 15), the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was established. In a 1989 plebiscite, Lanao del Sur voted to join ARMM, but the people of Marawi City voted not to join. Marawi City joined ARMM in 2001 following a plebiscite held after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), an armed Muslim rebel group.

Currently, Lanao del Sur has two congressional districts and 40 municipalities (including Marawi City). The whole province is headed by a duly elected governor while each municipality is led by a mayor. These two districts have their respective representatives to the lower house of the Philippine congress. Each of 40 municipalities is further subdivided into smaller political units called *barangay*, and are led by an elected chairperson. According to Jamel Cayamodin, Lanao del Sur embraces three types of political system—the multiple sultanate system, democratic unitary system, and revolutionary Islamic system (Cayamodin 2013: 78). The following section deals with the reason why such a multiple political system emerged in a modern political system, and how the democratic system was practiced within the complex system of Maranao politics.

TRANSFORMING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION IN LANA DEL SUR

Modernists assert that societies always emerge from its traditional beginnings. The contrast between traditional and modern social structure has been discussed extensively by way of various typologies, such as the status-contract society (Sir Henry Maine), kinship-political societies (Vinogradoff), *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* (Toennies), and communal-associational relations (MacIver), etc., (Mckinney 1966; Redfield 1947). In the process of modernisation, it is natural that the authority system also changes from the traditional to the legal one, which affects all other aspects of the social structure (Saber 1967: 210).

Transplanting the Western democratic system to Lanao came along with the conscious efforts to change the local cultures and make it fit the modern governmental system. The public school system which used English as a medium of instruction was introduced for the younger generation, and Christian missionary activities spread around the region. The new administrative division imposed upon traditional kinship society restructured the political society into a territorial jurisdiction. Local administrators were first appointed by the central authority, and later on, the election system was gradually put into place to fill the various public positions. These changes happened not only in Lanao but also all around the Philippines. However, the impact was different because Christianised areas had already been put under a loosely centralised governmental system, as well as a limited election system during the Spanish colonial period. The Western educational system and Christian missionary activities were not entirely foreign to the Christianised Filipinos.

However, the Muslim Maranaos had to face a totally new system of government. The dominant authority of the appointed or elected public officials were superimposed on the traditional elites. Likewise, the role of the traditional elites in settling conflicts among their subordinates lost its ground due to the establishment of a legal police agency which represented by the modern government. In effect, the locus of power shifted from traditional leadership composed of the sultans and datus to modern political leadership exercised by the legal officials (Benitez 1969: 15). The newly-introduced modern institutions could only be perceived by the Maranaos as challenges or new opportunities depending on the situation.

The newly-introduced modern system of government operated under traditional local culture, which proved inconsistent. Fred Riggs called it a “prismatic model of society,” which refers to the “co-existence of traditional and modern cultural systems, each with its distinctive norms and practices.” Clashes between the traditionalists and modernists, along with organisational dysfunction, were expected to occur (Abdulrachman and Makol 2013: 29). The case of Lanao also confirms Riggs’ model, as explicated in according to various literature. In the process of acculturation, adults were usually too late for formal education and training, which compelled them to send their youth to modern institution of leaning and acquiring knowledge and power. This was the case of many traditional Maranao elites, who prepared their next generations to remain in power under the newly-emerging political system (Saber 1967: 184).

Unlike the traditional political system of Lanao where the authority was dispersed among various local clan leaders, the new authority system is hierarchical, where power emanates from the central government and cascades down to the local *barangay* level. Upon imposing a new rule of the game for acquiring political authority, some traditional elites who were receptive to the new political environment tried to reinvent themselves to fit into the new system. Competitions for the appointed or elected positions among the political aspirants become so severe that they utilised whatever means to win. The traditional values of unity and cooperation among elites have been replaced by competition and rivalry in power (Abdulrachman and Makol 2013: 30).

New political values and institutions loosened the grip of traditional social structures and practices in Lanao.⁵ The new system also changed the most important role of traditional leaders in conflict mediation. The legal position provided stronger leverage for conflict mediation. Traditional elites began to utilise the modern government apparatus to reinforce their power and influence both in the traditional and modern spheres. They coordinated

with local government agencies in resolving conflicts and implementing government projects and programs. These functions were strengthened and became officially legitimised as they assumed political positions in the government (Barcenas 2000: 142; Saber 1967: 105).

As they competed for government positions, the clans also sought the support of powerful men outside of their communities, especially prominent political figures in Manila. Under such political environment, local political aspirants exerted effort to connect with outsiders, that the interest of the people from the locality became secondary.⁶ Due to the centralised political system, local politicians played the role of agents who carry out the central government's programs in the region, even if these are contradictory to the interests of the locality people. A representative case in the earlier period was the facilitation and protection of Christian migrants to the Muslim area. This fact engendered increasing distrust of the traditional elites who turned to a government officer (Brown 1988: 72). Upon expanding the educational and political opportunity to the wider populace, the initial monopoly of political power by the traditional elites was increasingly challenged. The most prominent figures who challenged the traditional politicians were the scholar groups, the ulama, and the youth who had modern higher education.

The ulama groups abhorred not only the traditional elites' manipulation of democratic institutions for their own interests but also the degradation of Islamic values by the influence of Westernisation. They believed that politicians gave a bad name to Islam and corrupted Muslims, by turning politics into an instrument of social degradation, criminality and other un-Islamic acts (Madale 1998: 19). They tried to find an alternative way from the international Islamic reform movement. A group of ulama organised an Islamic reform movement called "Kamilol Islam Society"⁷ in 1936 with the cooperation of some traditional elites (Midori 2009: 145). The Islamic social movement gradually affected local politics in Lanao. Some Islamic idealists also tried to engage in modern politics by running in local elections with Islamic party platforms. Examples of this are the Ompia (Reform) Party and the Ulama Party, among others (Panda 2009). Aside from them, there were also some people, especially the educated youth, who organised militant groups for armed struggle against the Philippine government. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Fronts (MILF) are representative cases. Both struggled for the establishment of an independent Islamic state at the most, or at least, the achievement of meaningful autonomy. Every government of the Philippines tried to resolve the armed rebellions through peace talks or military campaigns, but the conflict has yet to be settled until today.

The factors described above—the inclusion of the Muslim area to the Christian dominated Philippines, the imposition of the new political system, the Islamic Reform movement, and the outbreak of armed struggles—have affected the way of adaptation and transformation of Western democracy in Lanao. By examining the historical context and the operational mechanisms of the two key institutions of Western democracy in Lanao, the real features of localised democracy in Lanao del Sur would be unpacked in the following sections.

Elections in Lanao del Sur

When the Americans introduced elections to the Philippines, local elections came ahead of national election. The first local election in the Philippines under the American rule was the 1900 experimental municipal election which covered only a few peaceful barrios. This election triggered the formation of modern political parties in the Philippines. The local election for provincial governors was held for the first time in 1902, and it covered only 32 of the total 40 provinces. The first national election for the Philippine National Assembly was held in 1907 where suffrage was quite limited;⁸ Muslims and other non-Christian tribes were not included. In 1916 the US Congress passed the Jones Law (the Philippine Autonomy Act) which provided the basis for delegating the entire legislative power to the Filipino. In the 1916 national elections for the both chambers of Philippine Congress, Muslims and non-Christian tribes were still not allowed to vote. Filipino Muslims were formally included in the Philippine local election system from 1932 and the Philippine national election system in 1935 (Carlos and Banlaoi 1996: 12–52).

The first local election in Lanao province was the municipal election of Dansalan (hereafter, Marawi)⁹ in 1932. However, the election was stopped due to serious quarrels among the mayoralty aspirants, resulting in the death of four people. In the end, a non-Maranao, Soriano Dologmandin, was appointed mayor (term, 1932–1934), replacing the first appointed mayor, Bernabe Duran (term, 1929–1931). In the following local elections in 1935, incumbent Dologmandin won the mayoralty of Marawi. The first national election for Congress was held in 1935; a non-Maranao, Tomas Cabili, was elected, and served for two terms until 1941. According to Benitez, the elected mayors of Marawi mostly came from traditional elites; they were either sons or relatives of past and present traditional elite families¹⁰ (Benitez 1969: 20–24).

With only a few exceptions, the politics of Lanao has been controlled by a few political clans—the Alontos, the Dimaporos, and the Balindongs.

Those clans descended from traditional sultans.¹¹ The case of Mahid Mutilan was quite exceptional. He did not come from a traditional elite family. He hails from a poor family and represents the modern Islamic scholar with B.A. in Philosophy and Psychology and PhD in Theology. He founded the Ompia Party, basing its creed on Islamic principles and distancing itself from the corrupt political behaviour of the traditional elites. He was elected city major of Marawi in 1988, and governor of Lanao del Sur for three terms in 1992, 1995, and 1998. His success was initially possible because of the political climate change, brought about by the democratisation of the Philippines after the collapse of the 15-year Marcos dictatorship (1971–1986). The new political experiment led by the local ulama seemed to earn currency (Panda 2009). However, it did not take long before the traditional elites were reinstated in Lanao politics. In the 2001 local elections, the Alonto clan reclaimed the governorship of Lanao del Sur. The Ompia Party was mired in strife and was divided into several factions after the sudden death of the leader Mahid Mutilan in 2007. The failure of the new political experiments by the local ulama was mainly due to the deeply-embedded electoral practices among the Maranaos.

Under the Philippine political context, local politics heavily depended on the climates of national politics. The nomination of local candidates is usually done by the big men in Manila, mostly party leaders, who are capable of mobilising political resources such as network and election fund. Consequently, local candidates are encouraged to establish closer relations with the big men in order to be assured of party support. It is observed that one cannot even become a town mayor without having travelled to Manila, get a *padrino*, and spent so much money (Benitez 1969: 41; Madale 1986: 31). According to Maranao lawyer and public officer Sagad Mabaning (interview, 2 February 2016, Manila), it is still a prerequisite to amass economic resources to travel and socialise with the people in Manila when running for office in Lanao del Sur.

Once connection with national party leaders is established, candidates may start the campaign, mobilising all possible means to win local voters. The three G's (Gold, Goons, Guns) are often mentioned by many scholars as integral in Philippine elections. These elements are particularly observable in the elections in Lanao del Sur. Maranao scholar Jamel Cayamodin (interview, 11 August 2016, Manila) reports that in election campaign periods, candidates for governorship would call on each municipal leaders to broker deals. Candidates and municipal leaders negotiate various deals like how much money to give and the benefits in case of winning. A candidate for city or municipality

mayorship does the same to each barangay official, and a candidate for the barangay chairmanship does the same to each family.

A candidate also uses the system of reciprocity existing between the sultans and the followers. Even though traditional titles are only titular in the modern political system, the existing kinship makes it still meaningful in the political process. The sultans often play the role of patron by attending to the needs of the followers. As recipients of favours, the followers in turn are expected to support the sultans in whatever occasions. Reciprocity, as it operates between the sultans and the followers, is carried over into the political sphere. During elections, the sultans are considered political brokers of their respective communities. The sultans can easily mobilise the people to support any candidate during the election period¹² (Benitez 1969: 45; Langco 2014: 116).

Being political brokers, the sultans decide whom to support. It is also an important consideration for them to support the winnable candidate. Once an agreement has been brokered, the sultans will mobilise relatives and bargain for their votes. Western democracy, which is founded on the rational choice of individual citizens, challenges the Maranao democracy, where collective rationality overrides individual preference. Adam and Boer described how such mechanism is practiced in the case of the municipal elections held in 2013 in the municipality of Kapatagan:

Different sub-clans were intensively discussing which candidate to support. When a final decision was ultimately made, a so-called *kanduli* (celebration) was organized to state openly support for one particular candidate that placed this sub-clan within the coalition of the “mother clan.” However, these alliances are never fixed and can easily change in the run-up to new elections (Adam and Boer 2015: 19).

Elections among Maranaos are battles that must be won whatever the cost. The incumbent officers privately utilise their official powers and prerogatives in the election process. This practice contributed in creating political dynasties in the Philippines. Lanao is not an exception. Elective positions are inherited from father to son or daughter, or husband to wife, and so on. In Lanao del Sur, the Alonto-Adiong clan is the strongest political dynasty.¹³ Political violence is often mentioned as commonplace in Philippine elections. ARMM, where Lanao de Sur belongs, rates the highest frequency of election-related violence (Co et al. 2013: 66). According to Matuan’s study, the six major causes of *rido* (clan conflict) in Lanao del Sur are politics (52 cases), land disputes (45

cases), *maratabat* [clan honor] (28 cases), retaliation (27 cases), accidents (26 cases), and drug related cases (25 cases). The cases of politics, *maratabat*, and retaliation are more or less related with elections. Election-related conflicts tend to escalate into full-blown *rido* and deaths for many people (Matuan 2007: 77–79). In Lanao del Sur, elections are scheduled to held regularly.¹⁴ The end of one election means the start of another campaign for the next elections. Elections are part of daily existence where friends become enemies and enemies friends depending on the political climate (Mednick 1975: 87).

What is the reason then for the Maranao elites' obsession in with elective positions? In the Western democratic system, an election is a legitimate institution where a person of authority is selected. Unlike traditional Lanao leadership where inherited authority was widely distributed among community leaders, the Western democratic system is designed to organise a centralised hierarchical authority system. The higher position holds power and privilege. In a study on Marawi elections, Benitez notes that “candidates devise ways and means to win the struggle since victory means the enhancement of one’s *maratabat* and enjoyment of power, money, and patronage” (Benitez 1969: 44). Mednick also argues that “the Maranao traditional elites vie for government posts or ally themselves with office-holders in order to enforce traditional authority and outstrip rivals” (Mednick 1975: 87).

Jamel Cayamodin (interview, 4 August 2016, Manila), notes that Maranaos vie for government positions for “money and livelihood.” He reports that the “election is nothing but competition to get the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) and employment opportunities.” Based on the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160), the Philippine government allocates the IRA to each Local Government Unit (LGU). Some local governments also have additional local sources of revenue such as property taxes and government fees. According to the financial report of the local government of Lanao de Sur, the IRA is pegged at 97.17 percent, 94.97 percent, and 97.81 percent in 2012, 2013, and 2014 respectively.¹⁵ This means that the IRA is the most important source of income in Lanao del Sur. It was observed that prior to the granting of IRA by virtue of the Local Government Code, few wanted to run for office in the *barangay* level. Since being granted the IRA, rivalries in *barangay* elections intensified, and the number of *rido* caused by political rivalry significantly increased (Matuan 2007: 79).

Adam and Boer (2015) report that in the municipality of Kapatagan, an arrangement of blood money payment exists where 50 percent had to be paid by the perpetrator and 50 percent by the mediator. This shows that eligible leaders must have enough money to mediate the conflicts. Traditionally,

sultans and datus played the role of mediator, and they accumulated resources from the community land or taxation. However, such privileges were stripped under the modern government system. Quite remarkably, 50 percent of the blood money is simply understood by the Maranaos as money coming from the government, thus directly indicating the close relationship between the role of politicians as mediators and the fact that state resources are directly used in these practices (Adam and Boer 2015: 24). In the end, the potential use of public funds for personal reasons makes elections in Lanao del Sur a competition not for leadership in a modern democratic system but for paternalistic authority in traditional society.

The Rule of Law in Lanao del Sur

In order for a democratic system to operate effectively, Linz and Stepan (1996) emphasised that political power should be exercised according to the established procedures and norms. In addition, the system of checks and balances among the state, market, and civil society should be worked seamlessly. In other words, the Western democratic system could not stand alone without the established rule of law, which regulates not only the election process but also the exercise of political power.

When conflicts happen in traditional Lanao society, sultans or datus played the role of mediator, and judged based on traditional customary laws, called *taritib*. Any important decisions for the community were made with the consensus of the elders. In such rural, simple, and self-sufficient society, the role of the state represented by the traditional leadership was quite limited, its structure and function overlapping without clear distinction. The legitimacy of leadership came from the succession rule of *taritib*, and the exercise of power was personal and absolute without any defined accountability. On the contrary, the role of elected public officers under the Western democratic system is clearly defined by law, and the exercise of power is subject to legal and political accountability. In the classic literature on political culture, Pye and Verba (1965) classified the former as a parochial political culture and the later as participatory political culture.

In an earlier study about Marawi City politics, Benitez (1969: 34, 57) observed that what actually occurred, and still occurs, in the city's political setting was the fusion of democratic political institution with traditional institutions and practices. Since most of the elected officials belong to respected and influential traditional elite families, their traditional status and roles remain in their respective localities. However, due to the inflation of

traditional title holders in Lanao, not all sultans are elected. In the Philippine legal system, the title of sultan is nothing but “decoration.” The sultan of Tara says this: “The power of the sultan is grabbed by the mayors and barangay captains. They can give money to the offended party. The people lose their confidence in the sultan because we do not have money, can’t solve the problems. We lost power and control over people in the barangay” (Adam and Boer 2015: 24). This statement from the sultan of Tara’s shows that somehow, authority and legitimate power shifted from the dispersed traditional elites to the concentrated few legal officials.

Being “sultan-mayor” has become a position of prestige, influence, and authority, which combine traditional and legal authorities. No capable accountability systems are in place for traditional/legal officials in the Lanao del Sur. Parochial political culture common in the rural areas in the Philippines, as well as weak state penetration into the Lanao society, have resulted in conflict situations. Lanao del Sur is one of the heavily-affected areas by the prolonged armed conflicts ever since the Spanish colonial era. After the independence of the Philippines, the armed struggle by the well-organised Muslim rebel groups in the late 1960’s made the region a conflict zone where the line of legal authority is not very clear. In fact, the Philippine National Police is not the only rule enforcer in the area; rebel groups also act like quasi-police and engage in the public affairs.¹⁶

Today, there coexist three different types of laws among the Maranao—the traditional *taritib*, Islamic law, and Philippine law. The traditional *taritib* are still being widely practiced among people as far as family or clan-related matters are concerned. Islamic law is officially being implemented through the Sharia court, mostly for civil and religious matters. The Philippine law is applied to civil, criminal, and administrative matters. The distinction among the three justice systems is not very clear, and the rule implementation is not unified. Such multifold judicial system contributes to the deterioration of the rule of law, and it affects not only the peace and order situation but also the operation of democratic institutions such elections and governance.

It is said that the majority of the Maranao do not report the deaths of their kin to the Philippine legal authorities. In addition, not a single *rido* was solely resolved by the Philippine legal system. These indicate that the Maranao traditional *taritib* still remains to be a strong and effective means to resolve *rido* (Matuan 2007: 94). One local non-governmental organisation, Rido Inc., led by Sultan Abdul Hamidullah “Pogie” T. Atar, argues that the Maranao consider these formal institutions as alien and only imposed by a (post)-colonial state on a much older cultural tradition and social order which still enjoys

high legitimacy among Maranaos (Adam and Boer 2015: 12). In an interview, Sultan Pogie (interview, 10 February 2015, Marawi City) lamented the lawless situation among the Maranaos. He conveys the following: “statistics indicate that the casualties of the armed conflicts have reached 120,000. However, other data tells us that the incidents of *rido* are indirectly related with the conflict situation, the unstable judicial system, prevalent poverty, and many others. The main reason for this is the lack of a system for conflict resolution.”

In the Western democratic system, elections are deemed most important as a way to place political accountability on elected officials. The strict and unbiased implementation of the rule of law is an important means to secure clean and fair elections. When such conditions are not fulfilled, the political accountability system fails to function and finds itself compromised. Maranao scholar and politician Armin Barra reports that various malpractices plague Maranao elections, from voter registration up to the vote counting. These include multiple voting (where paid voters are popularly called “flying voters”), vote-buying, and other violations by the election camps. By experience, Maranaos believe that the IRA would not be spent for its rightful purposes, only to be misappropriated by public officials. Another Maranao scholar, Ali Panda, argues that voters justify accepting money from the candidates, particularly those in power, since the money is from public funds anyway that were never used for the improvement of the city, municipality, or province. They see nothing wrong with this. In addition, the constituencies also receive money from other candidates because once they get elected, they will also do the same. Such belief makes vote-buying and selling a standard practice among the Maranaos (Panda 2009: 69).

When it comes to the legal aspect of accountability, the weak Philippine judicial system makes legal protests for electoral fraud or cases against the breach of public authority totally useless. There are some indications that show the low rating of the Philippine accountability system. The corruption perception index from the Transparency International shows that the Philippines ranks 134 out of 178 sample states in 2010. The voice and accountability index of the World Governance Indicators by the World Bank shows that the Philippines maintained a 40 percent to 60 percent downward trend from 1996–2009. The rule of law index from the World Justice Project shows that the Philippines ranks 8 to 12 out of 13 Asia-Pacific countries in every indicators.¹⁷ Ali Panda observes that Maranao candidates know that money counts in charges of election fraud and irregularities. Contenders usually receive the final decision coming from the Supreme Court when the next election is just

around the corner (Panda 2009: 70). Under such a weak and slow judicial system, elections have become a battleground for privileges and power.

Today's unstable rule of law condition in Lanao del Sur could be a side effect of the aforementioned cultural transmission from the outside world. Integration programs introduced by Americans, and much later, the Philippine government, were not completely embraced. This created a setback. The cultural incompatibility deepened the frustration of some sectors of the local populace, which resulted in prolonged armed conflicts. The conflict situation again diminished the power of state penetration in Maranao society. Due to the incompetent national judicial system, local customary and religious laws remained in effect among the Maranaos. Also, the multifold judicial system could not provide a solid foundation for the Western democratic system to operate as it is designed to be, but it provided participants with many loopholes to play around.

CONCLUSION: HYBRIDISATION OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY

When the West became a dominant power of the world, its ideology and culture spread abroad in the name of Westernisation or modernisation. Democracy as a system of government is an integral part of the Westernisation. The basic principles of democracy were formed based on Western individualism and rationality, etc. However, when democracy was transplanted to non-Western contexts, it did not thrive in many different cultural soils. Some democracies gave way to dictatorships, or created hybrid forms of government by accommodating the local culture. Various factors may affect the success or failure of adapting and assimilating the democratic system.

The transplantation of the Western democratic system in the Philippines was a modernisation project by the Americans. Modernisation theory predicts that traditional society will eventually give way to a modern-legal society (Mckinney 1966; Redfield 1947). However, as Abdulrachman and Makol (2013: 20) argue, the process of cultural change does not occur overnight. It entails a long process of acculturation, assimilation, and adoption. In the long run, many elements in the culture will resist the changes. There are some elements of indigenous culture that resist the influence of newly-introduced foreign cultures. If the beliefs and practices from the outside world are adopted in full scale, then, traditional practice would be replaced. But if it is adopted partially, it would result to a hybrid one.

In the case of Lanao del Sur, Western democracy was introduced not by the will of the locals but by external forces. The adaptation of Western democracy also came along with its integration to the bigger Christian-dominated polity as a cultural minority group. This shows that Maranao politics has become heavily dependent on external factors. Under the new political environment, locals began to perceive the local power elites' behaviour and the national policies as pushing them to a corner. Such perception provides space for resistance. Sporadic armed conflicts not only deterred social and cultural exchanges with the outside world, but also weakened the penetration of state authority onto the local. All of these conditions affected the practice of democratic institutions in Lanao del Sur.

The traditional authority system with collective identities is still functioning in the process of elections. The benefits of electoral victory are shared by families and clans which supported the winning candidate. The power and privileges of the elected officials are not much different from those of the traditional rulers. The weak system of the rule of law, whether caused by the strong local tradition or the weak state power of law implementation, makes election campaigns a lawless battle among competing parties. Due to the weak judicial system, elections do not function as a means of political accountability, and elected officials wield almost absolute power in their constituencies. As much as the traditional elements affect the democratic system, the traditional elites, who shrewdly adapted themselves into new political environment, are the major players of the local power struggle.

In fact, the introduction of Western democratic system to the Maranao changed the system of authority from the traditional to the legal one. Democratic institutions operate on a regular basis. But practices are very different. Elections and the rule of law are observed only superficially. The traditional conception of social relations and authority still shape the democratic system in Lanao del Sur. Various factors contributed to the hybrid characteristics of democracy in Lanao del Sur. The unsettled peace and order situation and the economic underdevelopment may be easily mentioned. It is also true that such social and economic conditions could be the side effects of the process of transplanting a Western democratic system to the incongruent cultural terrain.

From a regional perspective, the Maranao case is not at all unique in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asians have absorbed outer civilisations throughout history, but the adoption process was not a dogmatic but more eclectic. This tendency has been witnessed in the way some cultures embraced Chinese Confucianism without gender discrimination and Indic Hinduism without the caste system. Western democracy that transplanted to Lanao del Sur could not

take root and grow as it intended. The reasons could be found in the context that it was transplanted and the embedded local culture. In this respect, our understanding on the democracies in Southeast Asia needs to be based on the local cultural contexts.

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NOTES

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- 1 The emergence of powerful sultanates was closely related to access to political resources. Magindanao sultans exploited the strategic location at the confluence of riverine travel routes, where they could extract from passing traders the surpluses necessary to finance military strength and hold surrounding regions in tributary relationships. The Tausug sultans of the Sulu archipelago exploited a concentration of interisland trade routes for similar purposes (See Bentley 1984).
 - 2 Earlier writings (Goodenough 1955; Saber 1975; Warriner 1964) treated *agama* and not *inged* as the main political entity. Scholars wrote that the *agama* had a set of offices, and attended gatherings where they facilitate or make decisions. They follow established procedures for decision-making and taking action. Differences have been noted as the traditional administrative structure was expanded in time.
 - 3 The Jones Law, also known as the Philippine Autonomy Act, was an organic act passed by the US Congress. The law replaced the Philippine Organic Act of 1902 and acted as a constitution of the Philippines from its enactment until 1934. The Jones Law created the first fully-elected Philippine legislature.

- 4 The Commonwealth of the Philippines was established through the Tydings-McDuffie Act of the United States Congress. It was designed as a transitional government for 10 years, in preparation for the country's full achievement of independence.
- 5 An example could be found in the case the sultan of Lanao, Bernabe Duran who was a non-Maranao and the first appointed Marawi mayor (term, 1929–1931). The sultan of Lanao was a new self-made title by the incumbent mayor, which has no basis in the tradition of the *taritib* that does not permit any person to a title that collects overall power and influence over the entire *pangampong* organisation. The person who created the title for himself gained such influence as a government official that his followers also recognised his self-made title despite the resentment of other sultans and datus (Saber 1967: 157–158).
- 6 Many interviewees like Dr. Armin Barra, Dr. Ali B. Panda, among others (interview, 29–31 July 2014, Marawi City), lamented such practice of Lanao politics.
- 7 The society follows universal Islam principles rather than the indigenous Muslim culture of the Maranao. The activities constituted a response to the “civilisation policy” imposed by American colonial authorities on the Muslim community of the Philippines, in the form of resistance (see more details in Midori 2009: 149–50).
- 8 Suffrage was given only provided to males aged 21 years old and above, residing for six months in their districts, had other qualifications such as holding office prior to 13 August 1898, owned real property worth at least P 500, and could read, write or speak English or Spanish (Carlos and Banlaoi 1996: 18).
- 9 The Americans developed Dansalan as the centre of colonial administration in Lanao, which renamed Marawi (currently the Islamic City of Marawi) and later became the capital city of Lanao de Sur.
- 10 The category of “traditional leader” in the context of Lanao del Sur is subject to huge inflation and may not reveal that much about the actual social position of a person in a certain community (Adam and Boer 2015: 11).
- 11 The Alonto clan descends from the Sultan of Bayabao, the Dimaporo clan from the Sultan of Royale House of Masiu, and the Balindong clan to Sultan Amer Macaorao Balindong.
- 12 Each person who claims membership in one *agama* believes that he has a right to vote there, no matter where he lives. Thus, on election day, there is much traveling around as each seek to vote in each *agama* (Warriner 1975: 78).
- 13 The most notable members of the Alonto-Adiong clan are the following: Alauya Adiong Alonto, the first Muslim Senator and signatory to the 1935 Constitution; Datu Birua Alonto, mayor of Marawi City in 1938; Domocao Alangadi Alonto, governor, congressman, and senator from 1958 to 1961; Abdul Ghaffur Alonto, governor of Lanao del Sur for two terms from 1960 to 1967; Princess Tarhata Alonto-Lucman, governor, Lanao del Sur from 1970 to 1988; Rashid Lucman, congressman; Mamintal Adiong, congressman and governor, Lanao del Sur; Abul Khayr Alonto, Speaker, ARMM; Ansaruddin Alonto Adiong, Assemblyman and Regional Governor, ARMM; Mamintal Alonto Adiong Jr., governor, Lanao del Sur from 2007 to 2016.
- 14 Various elections come one after another. These are: (1) national and local elections for President, Vice President, senators, congressmen, governors and mayors; (2) elections for barangay officials, (3) elections for ARMM governor, vice governor and assemblymen, and (4) the mid (presidential) term elections for congressmen, provincial, and municipal officials.
- 15 Typically for municipalities, the IRA accounts for 90 percent of total revenues. Since cities have more sources of local revenues, IRA ranges from 50 percent to 70 percent of their total budget. The figures are from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_Revenue_Allotment (accessed 1 September 2016).
- 16 During the field work in Lanao del Sur, the author encountered several check points controlled by armed rebel groups. He also had a chance to talk with an MILF member assigned in an establishment in Marawi City as a security chief (interview, 2 August 2014, Marawi City).

17 The data were excerpted from the websites of the respective institutes: Transparency International (Transparency.org), World Bank (GovIndicators.org), and World Justice Project (WorldJusticeProject.org).

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