

Across Seas and Cultures: The Hajj Journeys of Sulu Muslims and Their Malay World Parallels

Melintasi Lautan dan Budaya: Perjalanan Haji Muslim Sulu dan Kesamaan Mereka dengan Dunia Melayu

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Paper submitted : October 10, 2024
Paper revised : November 29, 2024
Paper approved : December 27, 2024

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perjalanan haji maritim umat Muslim Sulu dan hubungannya dengan dinamika budaya dan agama dunia Melayu yang lebih luas. Perjalanan haji maritim, terutama dalam konteks umat Muslim Sulu, masih sangat kurang dieksplorasi dalam literatur yang ada, menciptakan celah penelitian yang signifikan tentang praktik beragama dari minoritas muslim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi celah tersebut dengan memeriksa bagaimana perjalanan haji maritim mempengaruhi umat Muslim Sulu, yang merupakan kelompok minoritas di negara mayoritas Katolik. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, sumber utama seperti sejarah lisan dari para jemaah dan catatan arsip mengungkap dimensi budaya, agama, dan sosial dari perjalanan ini. Penelitian ini menyoroti tema-tema utama seperti tantangan perjalanan maritim, peran jaringan agama, dan pertukaran budaya selama perjalanan haji. Temuan penelitian mengungkap bahwa haji tidak hanya memenuhi kewajiban agama tetapi juga memperkuat identitas lintas wilayah dan solidaritas di antara umat Muslim di Kepulauan Sulu dan Asia Tenggara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa haji berfungsi sebagai upaya spiritual sekaligus platform untuk kesinambungan budaya dan persatuan antarwilayah, mempengaruhi transformasi sosial. Dengan menangkap aspek-aspek ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memperkaya pemahaman tentang haji sebagai fenomena yang multifaset, dengan menekankan pentingnya jalur maritim dalam membentuk lanskap agama dan budaya Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: Budaya; Dunia Melayu; Etnik Sulu; Perjalanan Haji; Sejarah

ABSTRACT

This research explores the maritime hajj journeys of Sulu Muslims and their connection to the cultural and religious dynamics of the broader Malay world. The maritime pilgrimage, especially within the context of Sulu Muslims, remains largely underexplored in existing literature, highlighting a significant research gap in understanding Muslim-minority religious practices. This study aims to address this gap by examining how the maritime hajj journey impacts Sulu Muslims, a minority in a Catholic-majority country, and their Malay counterparts. Using a qualitative approach, primary sources such as oral histories from pilgrims and archival records uncover the cultural, religious, and social dimensions of these journeys. The research highlights key themes such as the challenges of maritime travel, the role of religious networks, and cultural exchanges during the pilgrimage. The findings reveal that the hajj not only fulfills a religious duty but also fosters cross-regional identity and solidarity among Muslims in the Sulu Archipelago and Southeast Asia. The study concludes that the hajj serves as both a spiritual endeavor and a platform for cultural continuity and interregional unity, influencing societal transformation. By capturing these aspects, the research aims to enrich understanding of the hajj as a multifaceted phenomenon, emphasizing the enduring significance of maritime routes in shaping Southeast Asia's religious and cultural landscapes.

Keywords: Culture; Hajj pilgrimage; History; Malay-worlds; Sulu Ethnic

INTRODUCTION

Sy Su (2018) highlights that pilgrimage is an ancient practice and a global phenomenon that continues to attract growing interest among scholars across various disciplines and perspectives. Similarly, Taylor (2011) emphasizes that religious traditions often embody the concepts of sacred movement and holy places through various practices. One such practice is religious pilgrimage, which involves the faithful journeying to sacred places central to their faith. Pilgrimage serves to connect believers with the sacred traditions of their faith by illustrating "where they are" and "where they are going" within these traditions. In Islamic context, the Hajj, or pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia, is one of the five pillars of Islam. All Muslims

are required to perform the Hajj once in a lifetime. Although it is mandatory, it is specifically required for Muslims who are capable (Werbner, 2015). According to Raj (2015), the Qur'an mentions the term "Hajj" 11 times, specifically dedicating Surah Al-Hajj (*The Chapter of Al-Hajj*) to this holy pilgrimage, highlighting its pivotal position and importance in Islam.

The Hajj experience goes beyond being a religious duty and ceremonial rituals; it plays a vital role in fostering peace, harmony, and tolerance in a linked world, encompassing various aspects such as political, social, economic, and intellectual elements (Werbner, 2015). Back to history of hajj pilgrimages experience, before modern air travel, particularly for communities in Southeast Asia. As Islam developed in the Southeast Asian region, the maritime routes in this resource-rich area became significant not only for trade but also for facilitating the Hajj. This contributed to the cultural wealth and enriched the multicultural landscape of Southeast Asia (Ladjal et al., 2013). For centuries, maritime routes connected regions like Aceh, Singapore, Penang, and Jeddah, facilitating spiritual journeys despite significant challenges such as piracy, disease, and unpredictable weather. The advent of steamships in the 19th century revolutionized this process, reducing travel time and increasing accessibility. These journeys were not only religious endeavors but also fostered cultural exchanges and reinforced Muslim solidarity across regions (Bradley, 2014; Chantre, 2014; Darmadi, 2018; Fogg, 2015).

The study "Kapal Haji: Singapore and The Hajj Journey By Sea" by Anthony Green and Mohd Raman Daud explores the significant role of Singapore and other port cities in the hajj journey of Southeast Asians. It highlights the challenges faced by seaborne pilgrims, such as distance and financial difficulties. The study also discusses the lack of personal accounts and primary resources of the pilgrims, but utilizes anecdotes, comparisons, images, and maps to depict the hajj journey by sea. Similar narratives are central to the memories of Muslim Filipino seaborne pilgrims (Green & Daud, 2019) that become our topic in this research.

Figure 1. Muslim Minority in Philippines Performing Hajj



Sources: *The Moro Times*

Sulu Muslims in the Philippines utilized sea routes not only for pilgrimage but also to maintain religious and cultural ties with the broader Islamic world, thereby strengthening their minority identity in predominantly Christian or Buddhist regions (Bradley, 2014; Fogg, 2015). These voyages often started from regional ports like Zamboanga, in Mindanao moving through Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, before heading to Jeddah. They were fraught with logistical challenges, such as securing passage

on steamships and dealing with restrictions imposed by Western powers in the region and local government (Chantre, 2014).

This research aims to explore the socio-cultural and political experiences of Hajj among Filipino Muslims, particularly within the Sulu Muslim ethnic group residing on Mindanao Island. Historically, before 1979, Hajj pilgrimages from the Philippines predominantly relied on maritime transportation, often taking several weeks and requiring stops in other Asian port cities such as Singapore, Colombo, and Aden in Yemen (Luz, 2020; Sy Su, 2018). This research is significant for documenting the historical and cultural narratives of these communities and for enhancing awareness of the distinct obstacles and spiritual journeys encountered by Muslim minorities in predominately non-Muslim environments. This study seeks to address the vacuum in literature concerning the Hajj experience of Filipino Muslims and its effects on their cultural identity and community cohesion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

***Gemeinschaft* Concept**

Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft* (community) aligns with the theoretical framework of this research, particularly in the context of maritime Hajj. *Gemeinschaft* emphasizes social ties based on personal relationships, shared traditions, and a sense of belonging within a community (Brint, 2001; Skacheva, 2022; Tönnies, 2012). In the case of Southeast Asian Muslim minorities engaging in the Hajj by sea, these elements of *Gemeinschaft* are embodied in the solidarity fostered through collective religious practices and rituals.

The maritime routes not only facilitated the physical journey but also strengthened the sense of *Gemeinschaft* among pilgrims, as they shared common goals and experiences during their travels. The practice of Hajj through these maritime pathways allowed for the creation of strong, personal bonds among geographically dispersed Muslims, thus reinforcing their collective identity as part of the wider Islamic *ummah*.

This shared experience of pilgrimage, despite geographic isolation or socio-political constraints, fosters a sense of unity, akin to *Gemeinschaft*, in which individuals are connected by a common religious and cultural heritage. Cultural resilience theory complements this idea by illustrating how these communities, in preserving their maritime Hajj tradition, adapt to challenges while maintaining strong communal ties, rooted in shared religious obligations. By asserting and reinforcing their Islamic identity through these pilgrimage routes, these Muslim minorities demonstrate the strength and continuity of their *Gemeinschaft* in the face of adversity (Adger, 2014; Hou, 2023; Ungar, 2008; Van Tilburg, 2004)

Preference for Seaborne Hajj

A substantial body of literature on the sea-borne Hajj of Malaysians, Indonesians, and Singaporeans exist which provides quite comparable hajj experiences and more importantly, cite hajjis from the Philippines. As an example, it is from these Malay accounts that we owe the narratives on the pilgrimages of Sayyidna Tuan Muhammad Said (Kadi sa Binidayan) and 'Abd Al-Majid Al-Mindanawi, two Muslim ulama or Islamic scholars of Mindanao who performed the hajj in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Heer, 2014; Hijjas, 2020).

According to Rowley & El-hamdan Sas (1978) Many of the pilgrims from the Philippines and Southeast Asia were transported by hajj ships or the *kapal hajji* in Malay until the 1970s. Statistical data indicates that the majority of pilgrims from the Philippines traditionally traveled by sea. However, the advent of the jet age made air travel to Saudi Arabia possible, though at a higher cost. As a result, fewer Muslim Filipinos chose this mode of transportation. For instance, from 1971-1973, of the 1245

Muslim Filipinos who performed the Hajj, 22.90 percent went to Saudi Arabia by airplanes.

Some writers on the subject have essentially claimed that air transportation and other modern innovations associated with the conduct of hajj have diminished the traditional experience and character of the Hajj. Pilgrim ships from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia could take between three months to more than a year, and they needed to be on schedule to avoid being stranded or turned back. After World War Two, the average voyage time for a steamship from Singapore to Jeddah was estimated to be about 14 days (Green & Daud, 2019; Rowley & El-hamdan Sas, 1978).

Considering the number of days a ship needed to sail in Philippine waters and the south China Sea before reaching Singapore, the total voyage days could easily exceed three weeks. When circumstances force them to get stranded at the ports on their route, their stay on the ships could run at least two to three months. The time spent aboard the ships was dependent on several factors like number of passengers, ship speed, ship conditions, maritime conditions, among others. The return voyage usually had similar duration (Gedacht, 2019; Thohir, 2015).

In the late 1940s, Muslim pilgrims from the Philippines, including Sulu and other Filipinos, traveled to Hajj alongside Malay and Northern Chinese passengers on ships passing through Singapore. References to Muslims During the pre-Spanish era, Muslims traveled from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia using a sea route that passed through several countries. Even during the American Regime, Moros used shipping lines based out of Singapore to travel to Mecca for the hajj (Chambert-Loir, 2014). In 1930, Frank Laubach (1930) Muslim Filipinos from Zamboanga embarked on a journey to Makkah for the pilgrimage, spending between ₱700 and ₱1,000 each. They traveled by launch and steamer to Singapore, then boarded a larger ship to cross the Indian Ocean to Jeddah. From there, they continued their journey overland to Mecca, where they spent twenty-seven days praying at Masjid al-Haram. Matias Cuadra believed these pilgrimages helped Muslims from Mindanao and Sulu learn modern methods and ways of life from more advanced Islamic societies. This route became the standard for Sulu pilgrims, with Zamboanga and Manila serving as key embarkation and disembarkation points even into the 1960s (Frank, 1930).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research examines the Hajj by sea experience among Sulu Muslims by blending historical analysis with oral history, exploring both the historical context and its contemporary significance. It employs documentary analysis of written records and archival documents, alongside oral history interviews with community members, to enrich understanding of how these practices shape social and cultural identities. By incorporating both sources, the research aims to reveal perspectives often missing from formal history, offering a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the Sulu Muslim community.

The analysis of the collected data will follow a systematic approach, focusing on thematic and narrative analysis. Both documentary and oral history data will be analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and recurring themes related to Hajj practices. We choose informant based on their knowledge of, or participation in, Hajj practices, providing a first-hand perspective that enriches the historical context. The respondents' oral histories help to fill gaps in written records, offering a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural implications of Hajj within this specific community. List of our informant for explore oral history, in table 1.

Table 1. Informant data

Name	Place of resident	Age	Year of Hajj by ship
Hj.Isham Madid and His Wife	Tawi-Tawi	70-65	1950
Hj. Madiling Talonto and His wife	Basilan	80-70	1949
Hj. Ali and His Wife	Marawi	70-65	1952

Source: Informant data analyzed by the author.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Getting to Know the Sulu Muslim Society

The so-called Sulu society, also known as the Tausūg, is not a single ethnic group but a group of ethnic groups that inhabit the Sulu Islands, a chain of some three hundred islands and islets of volcanic and coral origin, strung out between Borneo and the Philippines (R. & Orosa, 1924; Rodriguez et al., 2022). According to Sulu’s oral history, Bangsa Sulu comprises various tribes including the Buranun, Tagimaha (Yakan), Baklaya, Dampuans, Banjar, Samal, Ilanun, Subanun, Mulbug, Kalibugan, Mapun, and others (Ali, 2013; ALIH, 2021; Hasaruddin, 2019; Ingilan & Abdurajak, 2021).

Their connection with the sea makes them known as sea people or nomads. The majority of the Sulu people embrace Islam, although there are still those who adhere to animism and other religions. Islam, especially the Sunni sect, is connected to the culture of the Sulu people, especially since they were under the rule of the Sulu Sultanate for hundreds of years until it fell when the Philippines became independent (Amirell, 2022; Clavé, 2024; Donoso, 2020; Flannery, 2021; Norizan & Suffian, 2017).

Figure 2 : Sulu Muslim Tribe with Their Ulama



Source: Islamic studies, Marawi University

Experiences of Pilgrims as Shipborne Communities

Possibly one of the most important communal experiences of the shipborne pilgrims from Southeast Asia was sharing a floating community to and from the holy sites. By necessity, the thousands of pilgrims had to call the pilgrim ships home from the

moment of boarding to disembarking at the Saudi ports and on their return to their homelands. These individuals and families, despite diverse backgrounds, came together to form temporary but cohesive communities aboard the ships, a phenomenon that aligns well with Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft*, or community. According to this theory, social bonds are formed based on common values, traditions, and shared experiences—elements that defined the pilgrim experience as they journeyed together (Brint, 2001; Skacheva, 2022; Tönnies, 2012).

Among Sulu people, the long weeks at sea and the shared rituals of travel, prayer, and mutual assistance cultivated a unique form of solidarity and belonging among them. So, in the context of the Hajj pilgrimage, travel is no longer a choice, but a necessity to socialize, build identity, to affirm or change (Gössling et al., 2018). On other side, The temporary communities formed aboard these ships resemble Durkheim's idea of collective effervescence, a concept describing how people achieve a heightened sense of solidarity through shared, emotionally charged rituals that impacted to collective efficacy, self-esteem, and society empowerment (Páez et al., 2015). The communal preparation and sharing of food, prayer sessions, and collective worship fostered an environment of mutual care and support, binding the pilgrims in a cohesive network of social relations (Gil-Gimeno & Aguiluz-Ibargüen, 2024; Liebst, 2019; Shilling & Mellor, 1998)

During their voyage, Sulu pilgrims encountered diverse cultural practices, including food preparation and interactions with people of different faiths. They brought food for the journey, expecting it to last 1-3 months, matching the estimated travel time. However, some carried extra supplies as a precaution in case of delays, sometimes extending their journey to six or nine months or longer. During the voyage, they also interacted with foods from other cultures, in line with Hall's (2011) observation that Southeast Asian pilgrims often gain broader cultural knowledge through food interactions. Our informant mentioned that Sulu pilgrims traveling through ports like Colombo and Singapore became familiar with foods like dodol and amik, observing how these traditional sweets took on unique forms in each locale.

The Sulu Muslim pilgrimage journey to Mecca via sea exemplifies the strength of communal bonds. Pilgrims often traveled with extended families, carrying essential provisions, including three crates of food such as rice, dried fish, sweets, and cooking equipment, because they were concerned with halal rations. Cooking their meals aboard the pilgrim ships became a necessity, especially when they didn't like the shipboard food. The travel groups were tightly knit, often organized by local leaders like mayors, as seen with pilgrims from Malabang who were assisted by Sultan Amer Balindong.

The sense of community extended beyond the journey itself. Upon arrival, relatives often met the pilgrims at ports, even if it meant arriving days earlier to wait. It was common for families to hire small boats to approach the ships and greet their returning loved ones as they docked. Hadji Isham Madid and other informants shared stories of how their relatives climbed aboard ships, despite the dangers, to embrace them. This tradition emphasized the familial and communal ties that the pilgrimage strengthened. Pilgrims like Muhammad Madaling Alonto recalled the joyful reunions, where relatives brought food, news, and sometimes even sad information, demonstrating the deep emotional and cultural connections that defined their pilgrimage experience.

The Sea-Born Hajj was Bittersweet Experience

The pilgrimage journey was fraught with hardships, including turbulent seas on the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Pilgrims like Hadji Ali in 1950 described waves as high as hills, forcing them to tie down cooking pots while many suffered severe seasickness. Collapsible beds slid during storms, rain poured heavily, and seawater damaged supplies. Hadja Madaling Alonto, a nurse, recounted a 1968 storm where she treated vomiting passengers while clinging to stabilize herself. These grueling voyages, often lasting months, coincided with monsoon seasons, testing the pilgrims' resilience and elevating the meaning of "sacrifice" in their spiritual journey. Comparing these

experiences with similar research conducted on Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern pilgrimages, we see recurring themes of physical sacrifice as part of the pilgrimage journey. For example, studies on the hajj by Indonesian scholars Azumardi Azra on *“The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulamā’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”* reveal similar narratives of arduous sea journeys, where pilgrims often faced storms and prolonged separation from their families (Laffan, 2005).

On the other hand, further comparisons with accounts of Thai, Malaysian, and Bruneian hajj pilgrims reveal similar experiences. Thai Muslim pilgrims, for example, encountered both cultural differences and physical hardships on their journey to Mecca, as highlighted by Champaiporn (2017). Thai and Bruneian pilgrims recounted facing storms and illness but regarded these hardships as meaningful “trials by God,” which strengthened their devotion and underscored their shared identity as pilgrims (Champaiporn, 2017). In Brunei, Muslim pilgrims under British administration faced additional challenges even before their lengthy departure, including poor health services, insufficient staff, poverty, limited access to transportation, and uneven hajj costs. Although hajj management in Brunei eventually improved with the establishment of dedicated personnel for hajj organization, these issues persisted until the 1960s (Mobeen, 2021)

Meanwhile, In Malaysia, where historical accounts of hajj by sea reflect a collective endurance of physical trials as part of the journey according to Baharudin (2014) study on early 20th-century found that pilgrims shared intense maritime challenges and that their ability to endure these hardships was a central aspect of their spiritual preparation amidst global challenges such as war, outbreak, and spread of infectious diseases. Moreover, Malaysia, especially Penang, for almost 200 years has been very special in the history of the Hajj pilgrimage because from 1786 to 1977, it was the departure point for pilgrims from Malaya and other countries in the region, especially Siam (Thailand), Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) (Musa et al., 2018).

Figure 3: Zamboanga Port in 1948 with an American-Flagged Ship Carrying the Pinoy Hajj Pilgrims



Sources: Faculty of social science, university de zamboanga

Inner Thoughts and Motivations

Testimonies from informants about their experiences at holy sites align with their motivations for performing the hajj, which include atoning for sins, asking for blessings, obtaining the title of Hadji/Hadja as social capital, and broadening their horizons. Most pilgrims expressed deep emotional responses, such as feeling overwhelmed with

compassion and piety. Some pilgrims, like Hadji Ali, completed the hajj multiple times, demonstrating a desire to experience its spirituality and share it with others. Acts of devotion, such as visiting the Prophet's tomb in Madinah, further deepened their connection with Islam. Many elderly pilgrims, despite their age, performed the hajj, viewing it as a final act of devotion.

Pilgrims often associated the hajj with blessings, such as having children or achieving financial stability. For example, Hadja Ali prayed for a child during her 1968 pilgrimage and became pregnant shortly after returning. The hajj was also seen as a safeguard against economic hardship. Hadja Isham linked her hajj to the prosperity and success of her twelve children. The status of a hajji was highly esteemed, and returning pilgrims were celebrated, often with elaborate ceremonies.

The sea-borne hajj connected Sulu pilgrims to the broader Islamic world and global cultures. They encountered various versions of their own culture, such as different types of *dodol* and *amik* sweets, and experienced diverse culinary traditions. Pilgrims also interacted with foreigners, including crew members from different parts of the world, which enriched their cultural experiences. This global exposure allowed Sulu Muslims to connect with others and reflect on their own traditions within a broader context.

The motivations and experiences of Sulu pilgrims find parallels in the broader Southeast Asian Muslim pilgrimage experience. A study on Malaysian hajj pilgrims by Binti Ismail (2020) illustrates that similar motivations drive Malaysian pilgrims, including spiritual cleansing, societal respect, and the aspiration for blessing. according to Haji Din (1982) found that returning Malaysian pilgrims often feel a renewed commitment to community values, viewing their pilgrimage as a transformative experience that enhances their social and moral obligations. In Indonesia The Hajj pilgrimage is accompanied by the implementation of various traditions which, although difficult, are considered necessary (Muawanah & Mustolehudin, 2020), all research supports the finding that the Sulu pilgrims' hajj embodies both spiritual and social dimensions.

Figure 4: Southeast Asia Hajj Pilgrim Embark from Ship Using Boat in Jeddah Port 1949



Source: Faculty Fo Social Science, University De Zamboanga

Impact Hajj Pilgrimage for Transformative Sulu Society

After becoming hajji, and returning home, they brought new power called “cultural capital” (Gilham, 2019; Zopf, 2019). Back home, the pilgrims have acquired a

title as hadji or hadja or simply kadi, “the one who made the pilgrimage”. Making a pilgrimage, in general, activates claims to piety, knowledge, and prestige, a phenomenon that continued in the twentieth century. After having returned to their homelands, they also brought back ideas as to how their society should operate. It has been observed that among Malay and Indonesian pilgrims who went to Makkah by ship, reformist zeal was brought back to the places where they had come from. That they had helped to spread ideas as to how Islam should best be practiced, and how a society in which Muslims lived should best be ordered; ideas that challenged those of the old order – the *‘kaum tua’*. To some extent, this also had parallels among returning Sulu hajj who helped reform the Islamic practices of their fellow Philippine Muslims.

For example, the story of *Binidayan* illustrates the profound impact of the returning hajjis. It is a part of the oral tradition, featuring the account of Sayyidna Tuan Muhammad Said (Kadi sa Binidayan), who embarked on the hajj in the early 19th century and spent several years on his pilgrimage. Upon his return, he instituted a governmental structure known as *taritib ago enigma* (Kawashima, 2017). *Kadi sa Binidayan* was revered as a saint, and his tomb became a pilgrimage site believed to possess baraka, or sacred power. People took plants from his tomb to cure illnesses, reflecting the enduring influence of his hajj on the community. Even those with limited knowledge of Islam gained new status after returning from hajj, often being addressed as “hajji.” This respect extended to young children and pilgrims as well. The hajj also played a vital role in the Islamic revival in the Philippines. Since the 1950s, Muslim missionaries have spread teachings in the Sulu regions, resulting in the establishment of mosques, madaris, and Islamic organizations. Many Filipino Muslim students began studying abroad, with reports indicating over 300 students in Muslim countries by 1967, contributing to a broader adherence to Islamic principles (Asiones, 2020; Banlaoi, 2008; Caringal, 2012; Cayamodin & Durakoglu, 2021; Germain, 2012; R. Hall, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Kawashima, 1999; Martin, 2014; Sali, 2020).

The drive for better Islamic education in madrasahs was strengthened when the Muslim Association of the Philippines, founded in 1949, received support from Muslim countries, particularly the United Arab Republic, which offered scholarships to Al Azhar University and other Middle Eastern institutions. Earlier efforts by reformist ulama, such as the establishment of Mahad Ulom in 1937 and Ma’had Sarki al-Omara in Baloi, also contributed to this development. Sheikh Ahmad Bashir's Agama Islam Society, founded in 1956, aimed to spread Islamic education, leading to the creation of Jamiatu Muslim Mindanao (JMM), one of the oldest and largest madrasahs in the Philippines (Kawashima, 2017).

But by the 1960s, the prevailing national mood in the country was characterized by political activism and radicalism especially among Filipino students and young intellectuals in major urban centers. But while the Filipino youth were enamored with nationalist and even Marxist ideologies, the Moro youth took on a different orientation and were consumed with an unprecedented interest in Islam which in turn prodded them to reassert their separate Muslim identity as ‘Moro’. Different Moro Muslim organizations emerged as religious leaders and western-educated Moro professionals worked hand in hand in propagating Islam not only as a religion but as an ideology itself.

An unmistakable shared perception among hajj pilgrims from Southeast Asia was the sacred geography of Makkah as a place of learning that is a source for the spread of ideas as to how Islam should best be practiced, and how a society in which Muslims lived should best be ordered. Returning pilgrims became active in spreading ideas that challenged those of the old order. In the Malay context this old order or status quo is called the “kaum tua”. Returning pilgrims were perceived to be those who saw the need for a new “young” order – the “*kaum muda*.” In the context of the Muslim Filipino hajj, the large number of pilgrims particularly from the Sulu of the Tawi-Tawi province is believed to have played a part in the resurgence of Islam in Mindanao which began in the 1950 (Baybado, 2020; Beckett, 1975a, 1975b; Casper, 1962; Houston et al., 1975; Majul, 1966).

Comparison of the Sulu Sea Hajj Pilgrimage with Other Southeast Asian Muslim Practices

The *Gemeinschaft* theory by Ferdinand Tönnies and minority theory together offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the distinctiveness of the Sulu Muslims' maritime Hajj journey in contrast to other Southeast Asian Muslim communities. Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft* refers to communities bonded by shared values, traditions, and emotional ties, typically in smaller, close-knit groups and Minority theory that explains the challenges faced by smaller groups in larger, often dominant societies that need more observation, experience and reason to dealing with situation (Elizabeth Burnette & Figley, 2017; Khalidi, 1989; Young & Cohen, 1988).

The Hajj journey by sea for the Sulu Muslims not only fulfills a religious obligation but also strengthens their communal bond. Unlike the more formalized pilgrimage experiences of Indonesians and Malaysians, the maritime route taken by the Sulu Muslims fosters a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. The journey is characterized by mutual aid, respect, and familial ties, which reflect a deep sense of *Gemeinschaft*, where individuals are united by shared experiences and beliefs to keep struggle under oppression that become embedded social construction (Hou, 2023; Van Tilburg, 2004). This bonding is crucial for a minority group like the Sulu Muslims, who face challenges of geographical isolation and sociopolitical marginalization within the Catholic-majority Philippines (Brint, 2001; Tönnies, 2012)

CONCLUSION

The Hajj journey by sea for the Sulu Muslim community, despite numerous challenges, has fostered important cultural practices like *kas'selai* (respect), *kapamagogopa* (mutual aid), and *kaplololota* (family ties). The pilgrim ships served as a space for bonding among different Muslim ethnic groups in the Philippines, where shared faith overcame linguistic and cultural differences. Beyond its religious significance, the Hajj plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, strengthening solidarity, and promoting societal transformation. It connects distant Muslim communities across Southeast Asia, reinforcing communal identity and facilitating cultural exchange. Maritime routes have been essential in shaping the religious and cultural landscape, contributing to the development of a unified Islamic identity in the region.

Ultimately, this research highlights the enduring significance of the Hajj as a vehicle for cultural exchange and social cohesion, linking spiritual devotion with broader societal dynamics in Southeast Asia. This study is limited by its focus on the Sulu Muslim community and the reliance on oral histories, which can be inconsistent or incomplete. Additionally, the research does not address the evolving dynamics of modern maritime Hajj routes or how contemporary geopolitics, economic factors, or technology might shape these practices today. Future studies could extend the research to include comparisons with other Southeast Asian Muslim minorities, such as those in Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, or Singapore, and explore the changing nature of pilgrimage practices in the digital era. Expanding the scope to consider the impact of political and social changes on the maritime Hajj experience would also provide valuable insights into its future evolution and continued role in fostering regional solidarity.

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