

SAVAGISM AND CIVILIZATION: THE IRANUN, GLOBALIZATION AND THE LITERATURE OF JOSEPH CONRAD

by
JAMES FRANCIS WARREN

The Iranun Age

Lanun. The name struck fear into the hearts and minds of riverine and coastal populations across Southeast Asia nearly two centuries ago. Recently, ethno-historical research has shown that where Lanun or Iranun maritime raiding is concerned, old traditions die hard. The terror of the sudden, harsh presence of these well-armed alien raiders lives on in the oral recollections, reminiscences, popular folk epics and drama of the victims' descendants in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia to this day.¹ Only in one part of the globe, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, did Europeans find 'piracy' flourishing extensively, pursued as a calling, not by individuals, as was the case with most of those who had followed the profession of buccaneering in the West, but by entire communities and states with whom it came to be regarded as the most honourable course of life – a profession.

The Iranun were frequently the enemies of every community and nation stretching from the Birds' Head Coast of New Guinea and the Moluccas (among the most productive spice islands of the Netherlands East Indies) to mainland Southeast Asia. Over two centuries ago, a Bugis writer chronicled that 'Lanun' in double-decked prahus up to 90–100 feet long, rowed by more than a hundred slaves and armed with intricately wrought swivel cannon cast in bronze, were plundering villages and robbing Malay fishers in the Strait of Malacca and the Riau Islands. Among other victims of their marauding were the coastal inhabitants of Thailand and Vietnam.² They would also raid in the Philippines, where the central and northern sections of the archipelago were under the control of Spain.³ Iranun

¹ Charles O. Frake, 'Abu Sayyaf Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities among Philippine Muslims', *American Anthropologist*, 100(1), 1998, pp. 41–54; Benedict Sandin, *The Sea Dayaks of Borneo before White Rajah Rule*, London: Macmillan, 1967, pp. 63–5; James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone: The World Capital Economy and the Historical Imagination*, Amsterdam: VU University Press/CASA, 1998.

² Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, *Tuhfat Al-Nafis*, translated and annotated by Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya as *The Precious Gift*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982.

³ James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981, pp. 147–56, 165–81.

squadrons regularly plundered coastal villages and captured slaves. Their exploits and conquests had the immediate effect of either disrupting or destroying traditional trade routes. Chinese junks and traders were driven off from states such as Brunei and Cotabato, the erstwhile masters of the Iranun, robbing parts of the archipelago of the traditional trade and exchange of spices, birds' nests, camphor, rattans and other valuable items.⁴ The Iranun earned a fearsome reputation in an era of extensive global commerce and economic growth between the West and China.

By the 1780s, maritime raiding or 'piracy' in Southeast Asian waters – although common in the past – began to occur far more frequently, and with far greater ferocity of purpose, than colonial authorities cared to admit. The regularity of the Iranun sweeps led the authorities in Singapore and other Straits Settlements to refer to the months of August, September and October as the *musim lanun*.⁵ No one at the time seemed to know for certain whether the intrusion of Western traders in the affairs of China in the late eighteenth century helped create the 'Lanun' phenomena. An ethnohistorically enigmatic case, the rise of Iranun maritime raiding requires contextualizing within a cross-regional hemispheric framework. The period at the end of the eighteenth century was commonly recognized as the 'Age of Iranun'. For seventy years or more, these fiercely independent raiders sallied forth from their bases in the Sulu and Celebes seas, and other parts of the archipelago, to prey upon the burgeoning intercontinental traffic sailing between Europe, India and China, and the regional traffic from Penang and the ports of Batavia and Makassar to the east. The coasts of Borneo, Sumatra and Sulawesi soon harboured Iranun communities that specialized in the trade. But many Iranun raiders continued to think of Mindanao and Sulu as their homeland and main base.

From the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, Southeast Asia felt the full force of the Iranun slave raiders of the Sulu sultanate, as one coastal population after another was hunted down. Captive people in their tens of thousands, seized by these sea raiders from right across Southeast Asia, were put to work in the sultanate's fisheries, in the birds' nest caves, or in the cultivation of rice and transport of commodities to local markets in the regional redistributive network. Thus, the Sulu state created and reproduced the material and social conditions for the recruitment and exploitation of slaves in the zone.⁶ More than anything else, it was this source and use of labour power that was to give Sulu its distinctive predatory character as a 'pirate and slave state' in the minds of Europeans in the nineteenth century. China's tea trade with England and the global economy changed the pattern of maritime warfare and economic and social relationships among particular Iranun populations in the Sulu–Mindanao region, increasing its intensity and scope across the region. It led to widespread decimation and displacement of entire populations throughout the lowland Christian Philippines and much of the rest of Southeast Asia.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 152–3.

⁵ Ibid, p. 154; Owen Rutter, *The Pirate Wind: Tales of the Sea-Robbers of Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986; first published 1930.

⁶ Warren, *The Sulu Zone: The World Capital Economy*, pp. 9–16.



Fig. 1: An Iranun sea raider, attired in cotton quilted red vest and armed with a spear, kris and *kampilan* decorated with human hair. The portrait of this formidable warrior was done in the early 1840s on the northwest coast of Borneo.

Sulu was an ascendant trading state, standing at the centre of a widely spread redistributive network and economy. But it was under Taosug sponsorship and in the service of that interdependent globalizing economy that the Iranun raided throughout the Southeast Asian world. Taosug datus partially repatterned the social organization and ethnic identity of particular Iranun groups to meet the soaring European and Chinese demand, and to gain direct access to Western technology and Chinese trade goods. In this way, the exchange of Chinese tea and European firearms as entangled commodities, embedded within the framework of expanding economic growth and improved military organization, set the stage for the explosive emergence of particular Iranun maritime marauding populations in the space of just a few decades. Moreover, these highly mobile raiding populations took it upon themselves to 'modernize' and acquire foreign technology, including firearms, to rapidly strengthen their strike force and social organization, and to enhance their shipbuilding techniques and nautical skills. Indeed, the post-1780 era saw maritime raiding and slaving more widespread and intense than at any earlier time, as the Iranun borrowed both knowledge and technology from European and Chinese traders. Chinese compasses, European charts, compasses and brass telescopes were all widely used as 'weapons of war' by these intrepid raiders. The Iranun, armed with the latest navigation aids and with modern weapons, struck fear into the hearts of coastal and riverine people throughout Southeast Asia. The local populace was soon afraid to live along unprotected stretches of the sea coast or come down to the ocean front from the interior of many islands. Until quite recently, villages in many parts of eastern Indonesia, particularly on Buton, were either situated well inland or, if on the coast, on steep cliffs with extremely difficult access, the historical legacy of defence and flight against the threat of Iranun marauders and slave raiders.⁷

The large-scale forced migrations of the unfortunate mass of captives and slaves caught in the cogs of the Sulu economy shaped the demographic origins of the Iranun and the overall population trends and settlement patterns of much of the Philippines and eastern Indonesia well into the end of the nineteenth century. When people think of slavery in Southeast Asia, they rightly imagine tens of thousands of people stolen from their villages across the region and sent directly to work the large fisheries and wilderness reserves of the Sulu sultanate. The insatiable demands of the sultanate for labour to harvest and procure exotic natural commodities, such as sea cucumber and birds' nests, reached a peak in the first half of the nineteenth century as the China trade flourished. Now, in this new globalized world, Sulu, Mindanao, Canton and London were all intimately interconnected. A major feature of this emerging global economy was that over 200 years ago, Europe and the then emerging markets of East and Southeast Asia were tangled in a commercial and political web that was in many ways just as global as today's world economy. Yet another characteristic of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century globalization was

⁷ Robert Barnes, *Sea Hunters of Indonesia: Fishers and Weavers of Lamalera*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 44; Michael Southon, *The Navel of the Perahu: Meaning and Values in the Maritime Trading Economy of a Butonese Village*, Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, 1995, p. 22.

that it went hand in hand with degeneration and fragmentation. Even as economies of traditional trading states, such as Sulu's, integrated, others, for example the sultanates of Brunei and Cotabato, disintegrated, while regional populations across Southeast Asia were fragmented, scattered and relocated. In the context of the world capitalist economy and the advent of the China trade, it should be understood that the slaving and raiding activities of the Iranun, so readily condemned in blanket terms as 'piracy' by European colonial powers, later historians and literary figures, was a means of consolidating the economic base and political power of the sultan and Taosug coastal chiefs of Sulu, and which functioned as an integral, albeit critical, part of the emerging statecraft and sociopolitical structure(s) of the Sulu zone.

The Iranun originally inhabited coastal stretches around the mouth of the Pulangi, the Polok (polluc) harbour and further round the eastern shore of Illana Bay. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, thousands had also migrated inland to the lake and plateau region at the southwest corner of the Tiruray Highlands. The maritime raiders who, in the nineteenth century, were labelled the Illanun (Illanoons) were, according to the Spanish, a distinct people who inhabited the stretch of coast within the great bight of the Bay of Illana, from which they took their name, distinguishing themselves from other ethnic groups. This coast and bay, whose shore front constituted a continuous line of impenetrable mangroves and swamps, was readily linked to the great lake behind it, which the Iranun considered their stronghold and home, and hence they were termed by the Spaniards in Zamboanga and Manila a 'distinct race', *los Ilanos de Laguna*, or 'the Illanoons of the lake'.⁸ The Iranun burst quite suddenly into Southeast Asian history in the second half of the eighteenth century with a series of terrifying raids and attacks on the coasts and shipping of the Philippines, the Strait of Malacca and the islands beyond Sulawesi. Their primary targets were unprotected coastal settlements and sailing boats that travelled throughout Southeast Asia bringing valuable commodities from China and the West back to the most remote parts of the archipelago. Many of these marauders were sponsored under the authority of their rulers from the trading states of Sulu, Cotabato, Siak and Sambas. They were soon described as 'Lanun' or 'Illanoon' – 'pirates' – by those who suffered their depredations or either travelled with or hunted them and wrote about their widespread impact on the Southeast Asian world.

Iranun long-distance maritime raiding operations ultimately depended on the land for supply of arms, food and shelter. Hence, island, riverine and interior shore bases were absolutely necessary for the success of the Iranun marauding enterprise. The Iranun did not establish their raiding and slaving settlements on the peripheries of the various competing colonial empires at the end of the eighteenth century. On the contrary, dominating the seas of Southeast Asia, they established many of their bases close to the busiest shipping lanes and colonial port cities, namely those centred on Manila, Makassar, Batavia, Penang and Singapore. At the same time, they

⁸ Blake to Maitland, 13 August 1838, Admiralty Records 125/133 – Sulu Piracy.

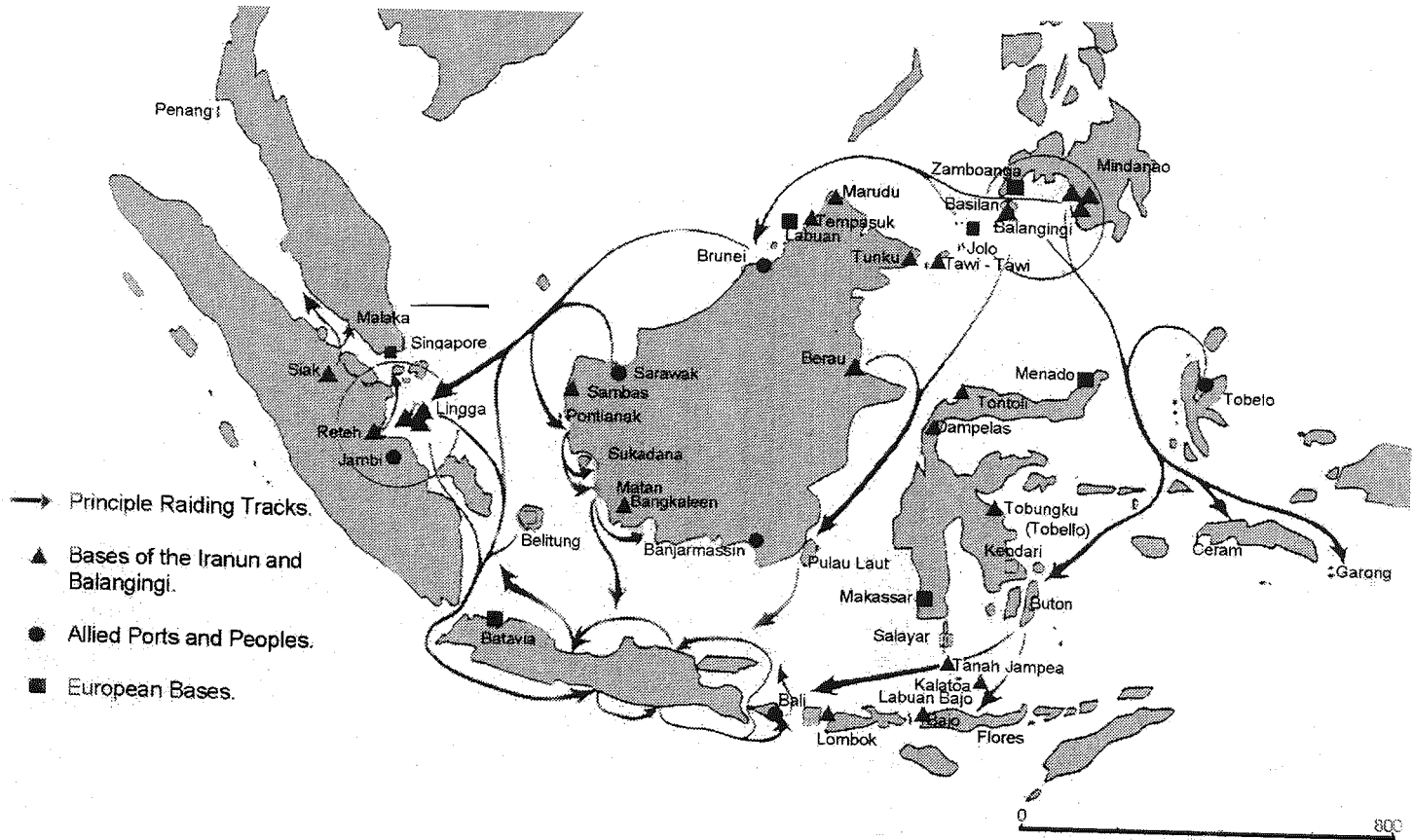


FIG. 2: Iranun-Balangingi maritime raiding and the Malay Archipelago in the first half of the nineteenth century.

allocated specific hunting territories to particular fleets, which operated from this chain of settlements and bases that stretched from Sulawesi in the east to Sumatra in the west. As the last quarter of the eighteenth century advanced, the distance and duration of Iranun voyages made the establishment of these satellite settlements, extending across the length and breadth of the major seaways, absolutely critical for the pursuit of their raiding and slaving activities. The raiding distances between Mindanao and Sulu and the edges of the Malay world, as they intersected with the Canton market, were very great. It would have been impossible for the Iranun to have carried on their widespread raiding operations year after year from their 'haunts' in Illana Bay and the Sulu Archipelago, without strategic bases, set up within the target areas or at key crossroads and 'chokepoints' along the major maritime routes. The migratory maritime raiders spread to the rest of Southeast Asia, establishing major bases in the Philippines, Sumatra, Lombok, Flores, Kalimantan and Sulawesi. These Iranun satellite bases that engaged in slave raiding and marauding were established by invasion, founded because of social unrest or natural catastrophe in their homeland, or through support rendered by a local ruler. Although the historical origins of these Iranun settlements differ to some extent, they also share much in common with respect to their basic purpose, settlement patterns and ultimate fate. In their heyday (1765–1845), the forward bases maintained a separate Iranun identity but were sometimes aligned with neighbouring realms and, at other times, were essentially non-aligned. Maritime raiding was the centre of their livelihood, but the majority of their inhabitants – women, children and slaves – were either engaged in subsistence agriculture, fishing or major local enterprises such as tin or gold mining. Located near the vital straits and rivers that they dominated, these Iranun settlements were comparatively large and prosperous.

At the end of the eighteenth century, as Western traders started to appear in Canton and began exporting tea along with other goods, the expansion-driven Iranun set up forward bases across Southeast Asia, ignoring Dutch, Spanish and British authority with impunity. The trading operations of European corporate enterprises, particularly the British East India Company and the Dutch VOC, as well as those of private Western traders, led, within the short span of three decades (1770–1800), to an unprecedented growth of Iranun society and population based on long-distance maritime raiding and its integration into the capitalist world economy. The Iranun sea warriors, like the Vikings, were worldly raiders who travelled in search of slaves, work and good fortune, sometimes for years on end, around the great ports of Manila, Makassar, Batavia, Penang and Singapore. They often spoke a number of different languages and were familiar with the traditions and religions of all quarters of Southeast Asia. Some were literate, able to negotiate a ransom or unravel the intricacies of the colonial legal system, and they were all knowledgeable in the martial arts, weapons manufacture and seamanship. Some Iranun marines doubled on their two- and three-masted *joanga* along with renegades as translators and gunners. The sea and the opening of China were the key ingredients in all of this. When the region's economy boomed as part of the process of engagement with global commerce, both these factors became catalysts for the Iranun to make new lives for themselves as marines and conscripts aboard their sea raiders.

Blood upon the Sand and Sails

Between 1780 and 1815, from the shores of the Strait of Malacca to the coasts of the Moluccas, Iranun slave raiding and 'privateering', a tacit substitute for war, dominated the history of relations between the colonial powers. While maritime raiding and slavery were a feature of many societies around the archipelago at the time, colonial officials and historians have encouraged us to see only the 'Lanun', 'Moros' and 'Sulu zeerovers', the pirates of Islam, but especially the Iranun, while conveniently forgetting Europe's involvement in compounding the Iranun ascendancy.⁹ At the end of the seventeenth century, the Dutch, a new global maritime power, emerged along the cold grey coasts of the North Sea to challenge the mercantile supremacy of both the Spanish and the British throughout the ensuing centuries.¹⁰ The larger international rivalries of these colonial powers – especially the British and Dutch – culminated in a protracted struggle for commercial dominance in the seas of Southeast Asia as both nations were inevitably drawn into the global macro-contact wars of the eighteenth century. In this context, international economic and political considerations played their part in aiding and abetting 'Lanun piracy', considerations which were often hidden from view within the larger confidential diplomatic manoeuvrings of the great European powers and their respective trading cartels.

What, for instance, can be made of the activities of the late eighteenth-century English country traders and the Iranun? The powerful British East India Company of the period was instrumental in introducing among the Iranun a tacit system dominated by both the indiscriminate sale of arms and opium and intelligence gathering, to assist the Bengal-based business organization against its Dutch and Asian competitors.¹¹ The picture that emerges of Southeast Asia toward the end of the eighteenth century is one of a vast emporium for the China trade and for foreign influence over almost every aspect of life, including politics, economics, statecraft,

⁹ Vicente Barrantes, *Guerras Piraticas de Filipinas contra Mindanaos y Joloanos*, Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel H. Hernandez, 1878; Emilio Bernaldez, *Resana historico de la guerra a Sur de Filipinas, sostenida por las armas Espanoles contra los piratas de aquel archipelago, desde la conquista hasta nuestros dias*, Madrid: Imprenta del Memorial de Ingenieros, 1857; Jose Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la Pirateria Malayo Mahometano en Mindanao, Jolo y Borneo*, 2 vols, Madrid: Imprenta de M. Tello, 1888; Tarling, Nicholas, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Donald Moore, 1963.

¹⁰ Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, Dordrecht: KITLV, 1986; Charles Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*, London: Penguin, 1973; Kristof Glamman, *Dutch Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1958.

¹¹ Holden Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951; Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–1842*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1951; S. B. Singh, *European Agency Houses in Bengal 1783–1833*, Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, pp. 1–3.

religion and the social fabric. A large proportion of the population, including the Iranun in Sulu, Cotabato, Sambas, Siak and elsewhere across the archipelago were drawn into the propelling force of the global Chinese market economy. Important trade decisions were based on analysis of economic and political intelligence culled from Europe as well as the ships' logs and journals of private English country traders who were circulating war stores and sowing seeds of discontent in the farthest outposts of the Dutch trading empire. As the small states of the fabled spice islands struggled to stand up to the Dutch (with their own political and economic bloc), the British East India Company took advantage of political instability, production shortages and sustained losses in one area – Sulawesi and the Moluccas – to eliminate the Dutch as competitors, while profiting in another – the Strait of Malacca.

However, had Iranun mercenaries always operated according to the dictates of the English, the tacit 'privateering' system might well have functioned in the interest of the British and local Malay rulers. In practice, Iranun raiders proved too difficult to control, and once away from either the semi-official scrutiny of East India Company traders or official representatives of various Malayo-Muslim states, their maritime raiding and plundering was frequently indiscriminate. They also tended to prey on the ports, towns and vessels of so-called friendly nations, not just those of the 'enemy', as Francis Light, the founder of the British East India Company factory and settlement at Penang, learned, much to his dismay in the early 1790s, as did his counterparts in the Moluccas a decade later.¹²

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Iranun maritime raids had a profound, albeit decisive, impact on Southeast Asia. The Iranun have been rightly blamed for demographic collapse, loss of agricultural productivity and economic decline as well as the break-up of the Dutch stranglehold on the Strait of Malacca and eastern Indonesia. But the driving force for this process was still global and economic: the Iranun profited from Spanish, Dutch and English internal colonial problems and expansion, but were not the cause of the problems. In their remorseless search for captives and slaves, the Iranun brought the 'border arcs', or moving frontiers of the margins of the Malayo-Muslim world and of the various colonial peripheries, home to the centres, striking back at the empire's heartland around Batavia and Singapore, in the Strait of Malacca and Manila Bay, and beyond, reaching right across the top of northern Australia. These fearsome alien marauders originated from areas beyond the pale – unknown sites still well outside the reach of colonial dominion. An analysis of Iranun maritime raiding highlights the fact that most attacks took place in the waters of local principalities and developing colonies – ports, towns and villages – close to the coast. Slave taking and theft were the main motives. Their mobility, kinship and diplomatic connections, and their capability to either protect or disrupt trade, enabled the Iranun to forge regional-wide links, albeit a powerful, fluid political confederation of sorts, that could make or break local mini-states and

¹² Light to G. G., 22 December 1791, Straits Settlements Factory Records; R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 90–2; H. P. Clodd, *Malaya's First British Pioneer: The Life of Francis Light*, London, 1948, p. 75.

destroy colonial trade networks and population centres. James Brooke, the self-styled white rajah of Sarawak, an arch-political rival and sworn enemy of the Iranun, who interviewed the commanders of an 'Illanun' fleet in 1841, 'remonstrating with them on the crime of piracy', described their wide-ranging raiding exploits as a 'devastating system'.¹³

To the Spanish, the Iranun, irrespective of whether there was war or peace around the globe, were simply the arch-enemy – *moros*, *piratas* and *contrabandistas*.¹⁴ Rampaging from one end of the archipelago to the other, they carried out a 'pattern of tragedy so recurrent as to become almost tedious',¹⁵ as particular communities were repeatedly battered with a vengeance. They pillaged and burned churches and towns, preyed on cargo-laden sailing vessels and merchant ships, and disrupted interisland and regional trade, turning Philippine waters into a vast Muslim lake. At the end of the eighteenth century, no one in the coastal stretches of the Philippines was safe because of the global geopolitical drama that had begun to unfold in a series of acts involving Britain's entry into the China market, the sudden rise of the Sulu sultanate as an entrepot for the Canton trade, and the widespread advent of the Iranun slavers.¹⁶ A Spanish writer described the wholesale misery inflicted by the Iranun on the inhabitants of the archipelago as a chapter in the history of Spain and the Philippines 'written in blood and tears and nourished in pain and suffering'.¹⁷ Iranun maritime raids affected virtually the entire coastline of Southeast Asia, and even stretches of New Guinea and the Bay of Bengal were not secure from slave raids. In the east, the Iranun sailed down the Makassar Strait to cross the Java Sea and South China Sea to attack the north coast ports of Java and the large tin-mining island of Banka. Iranun raided extensively in the Sangir Islands, Halmahera and to a lesser extent in the Moluccas. They also pushed beyond the defended limits of the Southeast Asian world, crossing the South China Sea to attack undefended stretches on the coastline of Thailand and Cochin China. At the opposite extreme, they also raided, but failed to dominate, the dangerous coasts of New Guinea. In the 1790s, Iranun slave hunters in search of captives extended the limits of their known world even further, sailing well into the waters of the Bay of Bengal, touching at the Andaman Islands and perhaps scouring the southern coast of Burma. Less than two centuries ago, few homes in Southeast Asia's vast patchwork of coastal settlements had been left unscathed by the

¹³ Brooke to Stanley, 4 October 1842, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1852, Vol. XXI.

¹⁴ Charles O. Frake, 'The Genesis of Kinds of People in the Sulu Archipelago', in *Language and Cultural Description*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980, pp. 314–18; Francisco Mallari, 'Muslim Raids in Bicol 1580–1792', *Philippine Studies*, 34, 1986, p. 257; Warren, *The Sulu Zone: The World Capital Economy*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Norman G. Owen, *Prosperity Without Progress: Manila Hemp and Material Life in the Colonial Philippines*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 27.

¹⁶ Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898*, pp. 252–5; Warren, *The Sulu Zone: The World Capital Economy*, pp. 9–19.

¹⁷ Pablo O. P. Fernandez, *History of the Church in the Philippines 1521–1898*, Manila: National Book Store, 1979, p. 203.

'Illanun'. Thousands of people lost their kin and were forever haunted by their loss. Sudden capture, swift retreat often marked the coastal raids by the Iranun in the nineteenth century. Victims – especially women and children – were generally welcomed as new members of these maritime Muslim communities to which they were forcibly taken, often hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away. Most captives and slaves accepted their fate and new roles, large numbers replacing Iranun mariners lost to the hazards of nature, sea battles and disease.

The greatest threat to late eighteenth-century seaborne trade came from the Iranun who operated from the mangrove-lined inlets, bays and reef-strewn islets in the waters around the southern Philippines and Borneo, especially the Sulu and Celebes seas. They preyed on the increasingly rich shipping trade of the Spanish, Dutch, English, Bugis and Chinese, and seized their cargoes of tin, spices, rice, opium, munitions and slaves as the merchants headed to and from the trading centres of Manila, Makassar, Batavia and Penang. The Iranun had a stranglehold on this trade across Southeast Asia because it was so exposed along its entire course through numerous hazardous straits and channels among countless islands – islands frequented by a fearless seagoing people of predatory tendencies possessed of swift sailing *prahus* – which offered every opportunity for surprise attack. When small merchant prahus and Chinese junks made their halting voyages on the sea's calm waters, the Iranun were never far away, striking at craft of all sizes. They merely had to wait, sheltered behind a convenient island, headland or bay overlooking strategic sea routes, and sooner or later 'coastwise' targets, never straying out of sight of land, would cross their path. From England, the United States and Europe, other larger sailing ships, laden with arms, opium and textiles for the China market, repeatedly ran the gauntlet of these narrow straits which were the hunting ground of the Iranun. At certain times of the year, in these bottlenecks and chokepoints, trading vessels generally had to slow down in the crowded or becalmed sea lanes. The Iranun usually approached and boarded when the sea was calm and the air still. With most crew members exhausted after a long chase, panic set in. The British and Dutch realized that if they just ignored the Iranun they would become bigger, more dangerous and equipped with ever more sophisticated raiding technology. And that is exactly what happened in the first half of the nineteenth century with Indonesian waters having the highest risk of maritime attacks, and the number of cases increasing every year. Iranun maritime raiding increased in Southeast Asia at the start of the nineteenth century, as did the cost to the world economy in Asia and economic growth, which then topped hundreds of millions of pounds. Estimates of losses from maritime raiding reached as high as several million pounds a year. Most cargo insurers like Lloyds were helpless in the face of the onslaught. If challenged on the open sea, the Iranun did not hesitate to kill their victims, take over their ship and sell both the ship and its cargo in Sulu or on the black market region-wide.

Certainly no ethnohistory of the Iranun since the late eighteenth century, no description of the meaning or constitution of their 'culture', and no anthropologically informed historical analysis of the transformation of their societies can be undertaken without reference to the advent of the China trade and the rise of the Sulu sultanate; and the integral role in both these processes of Iranun maritime raiding and slaving – a role which was so forcefully felt by most indigenous groups

in island Southeast Asia. Yet, despite their major historical importance, the Iranun, the infamous 'Illanoon' and 'Moros', still remain one of the least known and most misunderstood ethnic groups in the modern history of Southeast Asia.

The Merciless Savage and Empire Building

Spanish colonization of Mindanao and Sulu began after 1848 with concerted naval campaigns against the Iranun, and culminated in the late 1880s with the occupation and conquest of the old ruling families that confronted the Spanish forward movement in mainland Mindanao. During that time, a period which witnessed the eventual economic and political collapse of the Sulu trading sphere and the consolidation of high colonialism, both the Spanish and the English systematically created, in official documents and pronouncements, novels, short stories and theatrical productions, a composite image of the Iranun 'character' as an ideological prelude and intellectual justification for the mid- to late nineteenth-century conquest and colonization. The alleged battle between savagism and civilization, with glory for the Spanish, British and Dutch and, ultimately, defeat and tragedy for the Iranun as its inevitable outcome, formed a major theme and metaphor of much of the official record and the literature, both published and unpublished, depicting Iranun and 'Malay piracy' in the period under consideration here. One of the most enduring characteristics of three centuries of Muslim-Christian relations and conflict in the Philippines was the susceptibility of non-Muslims to think about the Iranun in stereotypes evoked by the Spanish of *Divide et Impera*, giving the Muslim and Christian Filipinos disparate identities. Over the previous three centuries, most Spanish and Filipinos cast all Muslims, particularly the Iranun, in stereotypical images that changed somewhat from time to time to suit new colonial needs and conditions, but which were invariably denigrating. They were collectively labelled *moros* – an appellation carrying the burden of past foreign connotations from the time when Islam challenged the Holy Roman Empire for the domination of Europe. By the 1850s, the Iranun, infamously labelled as *moros*, were regarded simultaneously as depraved, uncivilized, subhuman savage warriors and shiftless, untrustworthy foreigners, who were unable to handle their own dispersed affairs and liable to annexation and conquest. Hence, in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of late nineteenth-century Mindanao and Sulu, the Iranun were still branded *moro*, which remained synonymous in Christian Filipino minds with pirate, savage and bandit. Such preconceived ideas and notions about the stereotypical meaning of *moro* and a contested sense of time and space had already been amplified in the metaphysics of Muslim-hating and empire building in the Philippines when the earlier tide of Iranun maritime raiding and the heresy and 'menace of Islam' swept over the archipelago in the later half of the eighteenth century.

The Iranun were considered in the minds of ordinary Filipinos and Malays to be well organized, numerous, fierce and ruthless. Their massive fleets and in-shore scouring operations were hallmarks of the Iranun. Flotillas of *lanong* attacked large trading ships and regional centres, while Iranun slave raiders, hundreds strong, harried small settlements along the coasts of the Philippines and Sulawesi and left such a feeling of dread among the local populace that anything threatening or evil

became synonymous in the minds of mothers and children with the 'Lanun' and *moros* – the notorious 'pirate tribes of Mindanao and Sulu'. The lesson to be learned everywhere across Southeast Asia was deep and powerful, especially for ordinary Christian converts whose belief system was essentially Animist but whose world under colonial rule was rapidly becoming 'modern'. On Luzon or Sulawesi, a Tagalog or Menadonese might see clearly what they might become if they did not live according to their highest evangelized nature. The Iranun warrior and seafarer became important for the European colonial mind, not for who they were in and of themselves, but rather for what they showed 'civilized' colonized men and women they were not and must not be. Stemming from profound differences between the cultures of Spain and England and the culture of the Iranun, as well as from Spanish and English colonial self-interest, convictions of superiority, and a chronic disinclination to view Iranun motives and actions from any perspective but their own, these myopic imperial images and beliefs signified by the signs *moro* and 'Illanun' defamed and dehumanized the Muslim inhabitants of Sulu and Mindanao, reducing them in the European mind and imagination to something sinister and faceless, akin to the barbarians who resisted Roman rule and Christianity, barbarians who had to be cleared from the seas of Southeast Asia rather than the lands of Caesar's empire. Not only did the pejorative images associated with the labels *moro* and 'Illanun', as ethnic pseudonyms, contribute to further misinformation, misunderstanding and hostility, but they justified and made more acceptable – as their lasting legacy does to this day – the final aggression and injustice.

The memory of the Iranun raiders persisted well into the first half of the twentieth century, long after they had ceased to pose an imminent threat. For example, Cullinane and Xenos stress, in their reconstruction of the regional demographic history of Cebu, that to this day the memory and fear of 'moro depredations' is embedded in the legends and folk histories of many municipalities and parishes of Cebu.¹⁸ *Moro* came to symbolize all that was dangerous, dark and cruel about the tragic confrontation, and the Iranun's adherence to Islam. For the Spanish, the colonial enterprise in the Philippines was in many ways a religious enterprise. For the British, sea tenure and empire were also finally to be demonstrated from a different sort of theology – capitalism and industrial technology. But the fundamental characteristic and central focus of the centuries-long mutual conflict and uneasiness had always been the fact that almost everything that mattered to the Iranun had come to be defined and measured by the seas – the seas which in so many ways were invented, 'discovered', and eventually ruled by the Spanish and English. The central fact of domination and empire was the fundamental attitude and belief that the Iranun possessed their seas only as a natural right, since that possession, in the minds of the Spanish and English, existed prior to and outside of a properly civilized state. What followed then was that the seas were

¹⁸ Michael Cullinane and Peter Xenos, 'The Growth of Population in Cebu during the Spanish Era: Constructing a Regional Demography from Local Sources', in Daniel F. Doeppers and Peter Xenos (eds.), *Population and History The Demographic Origins of the Modern Philippines*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1998, p. 89.

technically *vacuum domicilium*, and that the Spanish and English, who would control the seas and make them productive for Christ and world commerce, who would give them order and regulate interregional trade, were obliged to take over and exterminate the *moros* and *Illanun* of the 'eastern seas' in order that *laissez faire* trade and colonial Christian enterprise could be carried out successfully. This extreme posture and situation had always been incomprehensible to the Iranun of Sulu and Mindanao, and it was also clear that the central focus of these cultures in conflict had always been in the seas – the seas which, in more ways than one, were discovered by Spain and Britain and functioned as a political instrument, a commodity, an empire lifeline, a national prerogative and aspiration. The Iranun were defined by the sea, measured by their domination and use of it, and were to be dispossessed of it. But, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, even as the last Iranun villages and raiding vessels were burned or broken up, the denigrating image of the *moro* and *Illanun* as slave raider and savage pirate now began to hold new moral meaning for both the European and Christian Filipino imagination. The myth of the 'savage' now both evoked and guaranteed the final success of the larger sacred-secular drama of colonization, conquest and annexation and the vision of the Filipino people's own place in it, just before the dawn of the twentieth century.

Joseph Conrad and the Iranun

In nineteenth-century Spanish literature on the *guerras piraticas de Filipinas* and in English accounts about the Illanoon and Malay piracy there is an association of the male Muslim physical and psychological self with the raw environment and nature which uses the sea as a canvass against which *moro* and *Illanun* identity might be interrogated and problematized as a precursor to the cant of conquest. These images that were carved out of language(s) systematically by the Spanish and British were also imposed on the seas and islands of the Iranun, as a geographical sign of their dangerous, uncivilized, albeit contaminated, character, and labelled as ominous, 'vile', unclean sites beyond the pale. These sites of non-colonial space were important, as were the Iranun who lived in them, precisely because they were areas out of reach of colonial state control. The networks of atolls, rocks, shoals and submerged reefs were described as natural 'nests' and 'webs', signifying a breeding ground for rats, other vermin and spiders – frightening, dirty, destructive pests in people's minds that always caused harm. Hence, the best means of eliminating the danger of such sites of contamination and pollution, cunningly perceived to be 'infested' with rodents and arachnids, and carefully masked by linguistic images of filth and disease, was to 'eradicate' them, meaning the wholesale extermination of the Iranun. This reading of the sea and the maritime world of the Iranun in mid-nineteenth century European texts was not uncommon. The use of such pejorative language to describe the presence of formidable seafarers from land-based representations associated with filth, pollution and danger does not, however, undermine a potent 'other' political-historical reality. Rather, it demonstrates the suspect nature of certain European histories and literary traditions as their authors attempt to reinforce Western-centred myths, identities and traditions. Reconstructing and reinterpreting the ethnohistory of the Iranun in this way underpins the

nineteenth-century reading positions made available by the century-long crisis in Spanish–Philippine history and the construction of Muslim–Christian relations and identity politics. The dialogue of difference, when reinforced, invokes violence and attempts to break down the cultural resistance and armed struggle declared within specific historical landscapes. Eradication actually meant the systematic attempt by the Spanish and English governments to wipe out the ethnic culture and maritime way of life of the Iranun.

Sir Stamford Raffles and James Brooke handed down the theory that ‘piracy’, the stealthy nemesis of free trade and British dominion, was a sign of decay and decline in the Malayo-Muslim world, and that various sultans and chiefs had turned to maritime raiding and slaving because their traditional local–regional trading activities and networks had been disrupted by the growing corporate commercial strength and interference of Europeans, particularly the Dutch. Aspiring nineteenth-century empire builders, such as Raffles and Brooke, had every reason to characterize the neighbouring territories and seas they hoped to rule or dominate in trade as areas or domains of decadence, turmoil and decline, and whether or not they were sympathetic to colonial rule, later historians and writers, like Joseph Conrad, generally tended to adopt their view uncritically. Raffles and Brooke had also repeatedly maintained in their writings and public pronouncements, especially Brooke, that the *Illanun* were ‘fierce, numerous and warlike; without question the worst pirates in the archipelago’.¹⁹ Brooke’s essentialist, racist portrait of the Iranun, based on deep-seated animosity and mistrust, would be echoed half a century later in Joseph Conrad’s influential fiction. It was over thirty years since the Iranun defiantly gave up their last stronghold at Tungku on the east coast of Borneo in 1878. Though some of the racist and imperial writings of individuals like Brooke had lost none of their sting in the intervening years, Conrad was more inclined to portray what it was about the Iranun background and their life which led them to act as they did in their relationships with Europeans. Conrad began writing his ‘Eastern tales’ in an age when the rhetorical aspect of the New Imperialism played an important role in a linguistic, albeit cultural, reappropriation of the Malayo-Muslim world of Southeast Asia. Besides the visible alteration of that world by colonial conquest and annexation, imperial writers, wielding their pens as instruments of empire, were fictionalizing the environment, creating powerful literary structures that would frame and reinforce the patterns of dominance over particular geographical areas and conquered subject peoples.²⁰ The Iranun, as indomitable others, differentiated both racially and by creed, challenged this hegemonic imperial process and rhetoric and the narrative strategies of Conrad as he explored the encounter between Europeans

¹⁹ Rodney Mundy, *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes down to the Occupation of Labuan, from the Journals of James Brooke, esq., Together with a Narrative of the Operations of HMS Iris by Capt. Rodney Mundy, RN*, London: John Murray, 1848, Vol. 2, pp. 13–14.

²⁰ Jerry Allen, *The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad*, London: Methuen, 1967; Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, New York: Delta, 1978; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; Norman Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern Sea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

and 'Illanuns' in his novels which were set in Indonesia. Conrad's fictional 'histories' of contact and colonialism focus uneasily on the cultural encounters between Europeans – merchant-adventurers, vagabonds and colonial officials – and non-European people, particularly the 'Illanun', reconstructing the experience of both sides between various extremes and collision, leading to the eventual destruction of previously autonomous maritime groups like the Iranun and weaker Europeans.

Relying primarily on Raffles, Brooke and Royal Navy captains like Belcher and Keppel as his principal ethnographic and historical sources on the 'Illanun', Conrad has shown in his fiction how many European men, all non-English, suffered from a deep malaise in the presence of the dreaded 'Illanun'. Many Dutch, German and Eurasian traders lived in fear that these Muslim maritime raiders would sweep them and their fledgling enterprises and daredevil schemes into oblivion; and several relied on opium to comfort themselves and assuage their anxiety in the face of the 'terror'.²¹ In Conrad's fiction, 'Illanun', both noble and savage, had their destined place in the unfolding order of Anglo Saxon imperial history according to the dictates of time. Both kinds of 'Illanun' would be eliminated through superior British moral values, technology and legal juridical processes, and the passage of time, to make way for the presumed sovereign British way of life. The noble 'Illanun' deserved Conrad's pity for his late nineteenth-century condition and his passing, but his roving maritime way of life no less than that of the ignoble 'savage' raiders demanded strict censure according to Darwin's evolutionary scale of progress and the passage of Anglo Saxon history. Conrad's texts exemplify the position that these fiercely independent seafarers of Malayo-Muslim states such as Sulu were inscribed with shared values and shared norms through the structure of that state – a state framed and re-presented as a 'pirate' state and slave state. In the end, his fiction demonstrates there is legitimation of the dominant Anglo Saxon group's interests (economic, class, racial, religious). This kind of legitimation is evident in his writings with his protagonist William Lingard's desire to 'clean up the pirates' because their values differ from and do not conform to the Anglo Saxon ideas that are embodied in the dominant social order and with the legitimation of imperial and colonial practice. What Conrad preached in his novels, set in east Indonesia, about the inevitability of Anglo Saxon civilization and imperialism – Britannia – dominating the seas and superseding Malayo-Muslim savagism, regardless of courage or nobility, the children of his English and continental readers learned also from textbooks that were replete with similar images of maritime Asia, about travel, adventure, colour prejudice, and the forging of empire.²² An important legacy of the politically conscious literary output of Joseph Conrad in the years of

²¹ G. J. Resink, 'The Eastern Archipelago under Joseph Conrad's Western Eyes', in G. J. Resink (ed.), *Indonesia's History between the Myths*, The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1968; J. Warren, 'Joseph Conrad's Fiction as Southeast Asian History: Trade and Politics in East Borneo in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Brunei Museum Journal*, 1977, pp. 21–34.

²² Cécile Parrish, *The Image of Asia in Children's Literature 1814–1964*, Melbourne: Monash University, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1977.

high colonialism was his (un)masking of the ideological biases or wills to power that lay behind the pretensions to universality and impartiality of particular moral views. In other words, early twentieth-century readers were reminded of the way in which conceptions of 'reason' or of 'goodness' were the historical and contingent constructions of particular societies and cultures, and the links between such constructions and power.

Conrad's novels helped shape the vocabulary and the imagery that turn-of-the-century colonial administrators and settlers used to describe their actual experiences in maritime Southeast Asia and the lifestyles they observed among its seafaring peoples, like the 'Illanun', Bugis and Samal-Bajau. In turn, the accounts of explorers, naval officers, missionaries and other travellers and adventurers provided the 'factual' basis, and therefore a validation for the ethnographic image and imagining about 'other' people and places rendered by Conrad. This dark, refracted, albeit somewhat tempered, version of the 'Illanun' as a symbol of the naturally free savage persisted into the twentieth century, sometimes grudgingly advanced by a seemingly impartial Conrad.

In the mid-1880s, Conrad had briefly sailed in the Celebes Sea as first mate on a Singapore-based, Arab-owned steamer, the SS *Vidar*, and, as a fellow seafarer, had found something to admire in the Iranun maritime way of life. He spent only nineteen weeks serving on the *Vidar*. The future author's knowledge of the Iranun was thus not based on his own personal interaction with them but rather on folk memory and hearsay collected on board ship and in port, particularly in the expatriate community clubs and tea-rooms of Singapore, and from the non-fiction accounts of other travellers and adventurers. But having had no actual first-hand contact with them, Conrad generally represented them as bloodthirsty raiders, intent on murder, pillage and slave taking. Resink, a professor of Indonesian legal history, used the writings of Joseph Conrad to show that there were still numerous independent Malayo-Muslim realms beyond Dutch Java at the end of the last century. According to Resink, a mixture of Iranun, itinerant European merchant adventurers, and Bugis and Arab traders were the most important *dramatis personae* visible on the horizon of the eastern archipelago under Conrad's Western eyes.²³ But Conrad actually believed that in the judicial and administrative control of other peoples like the 'Illanun', the British had no ethical equals in the West. The English trait of 'simplicity of motive and honesty of aim' was not found in the business methods of most of the protagonists of Conrad's Indonesian fiction.²⁴ The reader does not have to be told their nationality; one only has to look at their names – Willems, Schomberg, Almayer and Hudig.²⁵ Conrad's novels and short stories explore the ambiguous self and that 'in between' space for their moral thinking and their moral lives, arguing that the Anglo Saxon imagination and technological superiority both resists and shows up the inadequacies of that larger dichotomy between the West and non-West as well as a host of other ones, including such

²³ Resink, *Indonesia's History*, pp. 305–24.

²⁴ Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, London: Penguin, 1975, pp. 20–1.

²⁵ Joseph Conrad, *The Rescue*, London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1924; Joseph Conrad, *Almayers Folly*, London: Penguin, 1976.

philosophical distinctions among the English and continental Europeans, between reason and emotion, fact and value, thought and experience. It is against this background of the reader being constantly reminded of Conrad's belief in the superior quality of Anglo Saxon patterns of governance, judicial administration and trade that the historian must determine how the celebrated author has framed and represented the 'Illanun character' in his novels.

The almost mythical Captain William Lingard – the model for Tom Lingard in Conrad's Indonesian novels – known as the Rajah-Laut, or Lord of the Seas, all over Southeast Asia from Singapore to Torres Strait, and from Timor to Mindanao, had made his fortune in the 1860s and 1870s by discovering a secret passage to sail up the Berau River in East Borneo. Tom Lingard, the celebrated Rajah-Laut in *The Rescue*, is also depicted as a man of 'high mind and pure heart' in accord with Conrad's conception of Anglo Saxon superiority in administering the lives of Asian peoples. The author is able to forcibly demonstrate the English merchant-adventurer's innate Anglo Saxon virtues of courage, objective justice, and assumption of responsibility and trust while attempting to effect control over the 'Illanun', a Muslim seafaring people with a philosophy totally alien to that of Lingard. In *The Rescue*, the 'Illanun' and their lord, Daman, a man of prowess with a fleet of between thirty and forty raiding *prahus*, play a central role in the novel. They had come to help Hassim, the Wajo prince, reclaim his territory from which he had been expelled by civil war and Dutch intrigues. They were simultaneously on the lookout for gunpowder, arms and plunder during the course of their special mission. Daman proudly tells his followers, 'the Illanun seek booty on the sea. Their fathers and the fathers of their fathers have done the same, being fearless like those who embrace death slowly.'²⁶ Conrad subtly portrays the 'Illanun' carrying out the dictates of their destiny and the not so subtle oppression and betrayal that such an autonomous destiny demands. Daman hates Europeans because of the treatment of his ancestors at their hands, but Conrad adds tragic stature to Daman's view of life to keep the novel from becoming simply another romantic tale of Malay pirates and far-flung empire: 'His father and grandfather ... (having been hanged as an example twelve years before) had been friends of Sultans, advisers of rulers, wealthy financiers of the great raiding expeditions of the past. It was hatred that had turned Daman into a self-made outcast.'²⁷

When the 'Illanun' lord and his chief captured two European men and held them for ransom, Daman's aim was to obtain sorely needed arms and gunpowder from both Lingard and a stranded European yacht, which was under the Rajah Laut's protection. Forced by circumstance and the drive of his own instinct, Daman entered into negotiations with Lingard: 'It was perhaps a great folly to trust any white man, no matter how much he seemed estranged from his own people.... Lingard's brig appeared to him a formidable engine of war. He did not know what to think and the motive for getting hold of the two white men was really the wish to secure hostages.'²⁸

²⁶ Conrad, *The Rescue*, p. 223.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Lingard himself was extremely wary of the Iranun lord, despite his own charismatic reputation as a great warrior, a Rajah-Laut – the King of the Sea – which had secured his safety at the parley up until then. But his life nearly gets turned upside down when the sinister figure of Daman appears. His purpose, his reason for seeking Lingard is unclear, but his motive was clear enough: the Iranun lord was intent on destroying him and seizing his brig and the stranded yacht. Lingard knew that ‘not one of them but has a heavy score to settle with the whites’.²⁹ Wasub, a loyal friend, had also warned Lingard to exercise extreme caution in approaching Daman at the meeting: ‘Daman is crafty and the Illanuns are very blood-thirsty. Night is nothing to them. They are certainly valorous.... Tuan should take a follower with him ... one who has a steady heart ... and quick eyes like mine – perhaps with a weapon – I know how to strike.’³⁰

Lingard eventually secured the release of the hostages, he and Daman being sworn to keep their word as warriors.

The character Babalatchi, the skilful one-eyed ‘prime minister’ and *shahbandar* (harbourmaster) who features in *Almayers Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, was also an ‘Illanun’ and had been a ‘pirate’. Conrad did meet a Dongala trader called Babalatchi when he was on the *Vidar* but it is not certain that aspects of the life of the historical and fictional characters match. Conrad’s character could also have been partially based on a seaman called Jadee. Jadee’s life and background fit with Babalatchi’s remarkably well, both having been sold as slaves to Sulu pirates when they were very young. Both also had similar careers as maritime raiders and *serangs*.³¹ In *An Outcast of the Islands*, the reader is given an insight into Babalatchi’s ‘Illanun’ past:

Babalatchi had blundered upon the river while in search of a safe refuge for his disreputable head. He was a vagabond of the seas, a true Orang-Laut, living by rapine and plunder of coasts and ships in his prosperous days; earning his living by honest and irksome toil when the days of adversity were upon him. So, although at times leading the Sulu rovers, he had also served as Serang of country ships ... he gathered experience and wisdom in many lands, and after attaching himself to Omar el Badavi, he affected great piety.... He was brave and bloodthirsty without any affection, and he hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea. He found favour in the eyes of his chief, the fearless Omar el Badavi, the leader of the Brunei rovers, whom he followed with unquestioning loyalty through the long years of successful depredation. And when that long career of murder, robbery and violence received its first serious check at the hands of the white men, he stood fearlessly by his chief.³²

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 200.

³¹ Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern Sea*, p. 150.

³² Conrad, *An Outcast*, p. 50.

Delivered to Sirajul Mulla at 10/10/84



ARK means

58

58

58

58

SYED MOHSIN BIN S. AL JAFFREE
S. S.



Bills No. *1*
 Shipped in good order and well-conditioned by *Babalatchi*
 in the Steam-Ship *Vidar* whereof is Master for this present voyage *J. Siraj*
 and now lying in the Port of *Dangala* and bound for *Singapore* and Intermediate Ports and delivered, after safe arrival of the boat, unto *Long J. Siraj*
 or to his or their Assigns. Freight for the said Goods, as per margin to be paid by the Shippers in *Dangala*
 before the departure of the Steam-Ship, without deduction, Steamer-Ship lost or not lost.
 IN WITNESS whereof, the Master or Agent of the said Steam-Ship has signed *two* Bills of Lading
 all of the tenor and date, one of which Bills of Lading having been accomplished, the others to stand void.
 Dated at *Dangala* this *12* day of *August* 188*4*
 The Goods marked and numbered as follows

Marks	Nos.	Packages	Contents	Weight	Value	REMARKS
	<i>58</i>	<i>Bags</i>	<i>Black Pepper</i>			

being marked and numbered as in the margin) and are to be carried and delivered subject to the Conditions aforesaid, and in all of these at the back of this Bill of Lading, in the like good order and condition from the Steam-Ship's Deck where the Steam-Ship's responsibility shall cease at the Port of *Dangala*. (The Act of God, the Queen's Reserve, Pirates, Hosts by land or Sea, Rebellions, Riots or People's Violence, Fire, Storm, Insurrection, Packing Inconveniences, Obfuscation or absence of marks, numbers, address or description of goods shipped, Leakage, Breakage, Break, Heavy loss or damage from Machinery, Buoys or Signals however caused, or from Willfulness, negligence or wreck however caused, or from any reason, loss or fire on board, or hail or crash or on shore however caused, or from any other persons in the service of the ship, whether in unloading the ship or from any deviation, excepted.) Having liberty to call at any port or ports as or out of the itinerary set out in any order or invoice and (including Goods, Cargo and passengers, and for any other purpose) in all ways or without pilots to tow and haul, to load in all situations and circumstances and to tranship the said Goods by any other means

Freight in full paid *Dangala*
ARK

Fig. 3: Copy of a bill of lading from the SS *Vidar* which Conrad sailed aboard, with the name of Babalatchi as the trader sending the goods. (Courtesy of the Stirling Memorial Library, Joseph Conrad Collection, Yale University)

In Conrad's panoramic examination of history, the 'Illanun' were neither devoted to nor inspired by the Anglo Saxon idea of 'simplicity of motive and honesty of aim'.³³ In the English writer's representation, where the 'Illanun' raided they intended to be masters and suffered no rivals. While Conrad admired the sea being the home of the Iranun more so than the land, he still considered them, like the Arab traders, both unscrupulous and resolute.³⁴ Conrad, when writing about 'Illanun' character traits and reasons for 'Sulu piracy', drew upon the West's deep-seated distrust of the Islamic world. Despite the passage of more than a century, the echoes of religious wars fought by Muslims against Christian 'infidels' on Java and Sumatra reverberate through his fiction. Conrad, in *The Rescue*, depicts Daman and the 'Illanun' as Muslim pirates descended from nomad, camel-riding ancestors, notwithstanding their inspired bold leader. The Europeans, whose yacht was perilously stranded, repeatedly use as synonyms 'moors', 'savages' and 'barbarians' when mentioning the menacing presence of the Iranun. Conrad, through this not so subtle process of negation, which unduly stresses Muslim religious zeal and fanaticism, makes the 'Illanun' seem even more dangerous – as the spectre of militant Islam served to prolong and nurture mutual hostility in the face of Western progress: 'Daman ... advanced alone. The plain hilt of a sword protruded from the open edges of his cloak. The parted edges disclosed also the butts of two flintlock pistols. The Koran in a velvet case hung on his breast by a red chord of silk. He was pious, magnificent and warlike.'³⁵

In *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad also dwells on Islam, war and men of prowess, introducing the blind, dispossessed leader of Brunei rovers, Omar el Badavi, Babalatchi's former 'pirate' chief, in a similar vein.

I knew him well when he had many slaves, and many wives, and much merchandise, and trading prahus and prahus for fighting. Hai-ya! He was a great fighter in the days before the breath of the Merciful put out the light in his eyes. He was a pilgrim, and had many virtues: he was brave, his hand was open, and he was a great robber. For many years he led the men that drank blood on the sea: first in prayer and first in fight! Have I not stood behind him when his face was turned to the West? Have I not watched by his side ships with high masts burning in a straight flame on the calm water? Have I not followed him on dark nights amongst sleeping men that woke up only to die? His sword was swifter than fire from heaven and struck and flashed. Hai!.... Those were the days and that was a leader, and I myself was younger; and in those days there were not so many fireships with guns that deal fiery death from afar.³⁶

Conrad thus perpetuated in the English-speaking world the *reconquista* 'moro' image of the Iranun – bloodthirsty, thieving Muslims – as a legacy of the Spanish friars and other European colonisers. However, when considering maritime raiding

³³ Ibid., pp. 20–1.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 26; Conrad, *The Rescue*, p. 295.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 293.

³⁶ Conrad, *An Outcast*, p. 33.

and slaving activity in Southeast Asia, it must be remembered that the Iranun were invariably defending their religion as well as their political system(s) and right to trade, along with the hypocrisy that allied the English and the Iranun against the Dutch in the sea war of the late eighteenth century. Old Jorgenson, the former captain of *Wild Rose* and Lingard's fellow adventurer in *The Rescue*, could remember the Padri War and the name of Sentot who fought by the side of Prince Diponegoro and who, as a *Ratu Adil*, earned the title 'King of the South Seas of Java'. It is Sentot's grandson who is one of Daman's lieutenants. Conrad therefore links an Islamic revivalist movement of central Sumatra and *jihad* at the beginning of the century and the eventual elimination of 'Illanun piracy' at the end of the century to the final formation of a colonial state, the Netherlands East Indies, embracing the Indonesian archipelago.

Despite the celebrated author's literary efforts to dissect the social and psychological impact of European colonialism along the margins of a Malayo-Muslim maritime frontier, his attempts to embroider certain aspects of 'Illanun' character and traits fail. Conrad's portrayal in literature of the 'Illanun', Bugis and Arabs as 'Muslim souls', individuals with inner lives capable of depth or superficiality, whose capacities for moral understanding and growth were intrinsically bound up with their traditions and transitions, their imaginations, their preparedness to be surprised by and to wonder at each other, and their Islamic world in conflict with the West, intentionally fostered a legacy of animosity and mistrust. In Conrad's case, moral understanding was inseparable from emotional response, and that to recognize a fact about the 'Illanun' was to be able to judge or value it, and that the capacity for serious and authentic thought about the 'big' facts of human existence in the maritime world of the Islamic Iranun was conditioned by his experience as a 'Polish nobleman, cased in British tar', and his reader's response to it. Conrad helped Western societies to remember the close of a traumatic period in Southeast Asia's history after nearly a century of upheaval and warfare from state-sanctioned maritime raiding by the Iranun that had directly affected hundreds of thousands of people and fostered a culture of fear and violence. His literature helped both citizens and institutions to forge individual and collective perspectives and memories of the 'Illanun', consideration of whose actions were still especially painful on personal grounds to many, and establish, (re)create and (re)interpret the mythological boundaries between the 'Illanun' and 'the reader'.

The real strength of this orphaned, Slavic seafarer, who even later as a famous author among the British, but always British with a difference, was that he addressed some of the deepest moral and philosophical implications of the West's rise to world domination, in a manner which took seriously literature's distinctive way of thinking about language, self and the creation of a new Anglo Saxon world under global capitalism and colonialism and the destruction of old societies and cultures within Asia, Africa and Latin America. Conrad's moral imagination and literary ethics were consciously Anglo Saxon, deliberately privileging a particular sort of English conception of autonomous rationality and class-biased conceptions of social order that both framed and constructed negative images of maritime Islamic peoples and 'far eastern' landscapes. Images of the Iranun as 'Illanun' were fixed in Euro-American imaginations by the linguistic reappropriation and rhetorical processes of

negation in Conrad's dramatic novels and short stories of the clash of savagism and civilization between East and West.

Colonialism's Pirates

The Iranun burst quite suddenly into Southeast Asian history in the second half of the eighteenth century with a series of terrifying raids and attacks on the coasts and shipping of the Philippines, the Straits of Malacca and the islands beyond Sulawesi. Their primary targets were unprotected coastal settlements and trading boats that travelled throughout Southeast Asia bringing valuable commodities from China and the West back to the most remote parts of the archipelago. It is estimated that during the last quarter of this century (1774–98) of maritime raiding and slaving against the Dutch and Spanish, between 150 and 200 raiding ships set out from the Mindanao–Sulu area each year. The sheer size of the vessels – the largest *lanong* measuring more than 130 feet in length – and the scale of the expeditions dwarfed most previous efforts, marking a significant turning point in the naval strategy of Malay maritime raiding as it had been traditionally understood.³⁷ Rescued captives interrogated by colonial officials had often been traumatized by the violence they had witnessed during the sea attacks and settlement raids along the coastline. The oral traditions of their descendants still speak of 'the terror'. They tell of the terrifying landing on the beach and the way that the slave raiders ended years, perhaps even several decades of anonymity and a quiet life, that hid their ancestors from the war at sea and the machinations of the global economy. Barnes, in his classic study of Lamalera, a remote community on the south coast of the island of Lembata, near the eastern end of Flores, notes the village is really a 'twin settlement', with the lower one (Lamalera Bawah) on the beach and an upper one (Lamalera Atas) on a nearby cliff for protection from earlier Iranun maritime slave raids. Villages in such settings were usually palisaded, but in this case (as at Tira, the site of Southon's fieldwork in Buton) the main defence was inaccessibility. Heersink also notes that on Salayer most of the nineteenth-century settlements were situated in the interior. Here the northern and southern extremities of the island were the least safe and suffered most from Iranun 'piracy', while the alluvial west coast became the prominent zone of security and trade.³⁸ New evidence has also emerged supporting the widespread fear and dread of the Iranun in the Java Sea. Stenross, researching the traditional sailing boats of Madura, recently accidentally came across people with terrifying memories of the Iranun still intact on the north coast, in a small isolated village. In Tamberu, he found – while discussing photographs of Bajau grave markers shaped like miniature boats – evidence of centuries old oral traditions about the 'Lanun' that signify tales of cultural confrontations and conflicts. These confrontations originated in the violent intimacies of the encounter between expansive Iranun and struggling, oppressed coastal people. Obviously, the fear of the

³⁷ Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898*, pp. 147–8, 256–8.

³⁸ Barnes, *Sea Hunters of Indonesia*, p. 44; Christiaan Heersink, 'Environmental Adaptations in Southern Sulawesi', in Victor T. King (ed.), *Environmental Challenges in South-East Asia*, London: Curzon, 1988, pp. 103–4.

Iranun went a long way since their maritime raiding tracks crossed regional and ethnic boundaries like no other before, not bypassing even a tiny village like Tamberu, reaching extremes of pain and alienation among the Madurese coastal inhabitants there.³⁹

But whether the Iranun were really any more wantonly cold-blooded than their colonial adversaries and neighbouring rivals was immaterial because by the end of the eighteenth century the traditional image of the Iranun warrior, as savagely cruel and destructive, had gained widespread acceptance. The complexities of relations in the struggle over power and autonomy on the seas, between the maritime Islamic world of the Iranun and the conflicting interests and machinations of the Western powers bent on controlling the oceans and sea lanes, demonstrates how a pathology of physical and cultural violence associated with global macro-contact wars and empire building, particularly with political struggles between the English and Dutch in various parts of Southeast Asia, led to widespread conflicts and regional tragedies. The enormous increase in global trade which affected state formation, statecraft and economic integration made it absolutely imperative to import captives from outside the Sulu zone to meet labour power requirements. As commodities from China, Europe and North America flowed to Sulu, the Taosug aristocrats thrived, and there emerged the Iranun – strong, skilled maritime people who were the scourge of Southeast Asia, as they raided in 100-foot-long sailing ships. The sea and tropical forests were the life-force of the sultanate, where tens of thousands of captives and slaves laboured annually to collect and process exotic commodities for the China trade. The rising demand for captives and slaves from across Southeast Asia reshaped the character of the political economies of Sulu and China and, as part of the same process, gave birth to the advent of highly specialized mobile communities of maritime raiders. Thus, the history of slaving and the slave trade and the rise of the Iranun must be framed as part of a unitary historical process, which explains the major factors contributing to the formation and maintenance of their ethnic identity, namely the intrusive roles played in their sudden development and expansion by the global economy and singular entangled commodities, particularly tea, sea cucumber, birds' nest and firearms. Maritime raiding, or what the Spanish, British and Dutch labelled 'piracy', was not a manifestation of savagism and decline but rather was the result of phenomenal economic growth and strength. The state-sanctioned system of maritime raiding and slaving in Sulu was part of a vital effort to partake in and control a rapidly increasing volume of global commerce triggered by the advent of Europeans in the China trade in the late eighteenth century. Accusations of cultural decadence and barbarism that were repeatedly directed against the Sulu sultanate and the Iranun by leading European participants in that trade are both ironic and incorrect when approached from the perspective of a unitary historical process.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, 'moro' and 'Illanun' emerged as terms of 'character' in colonial policy and practice and public discourse, wrongly implying a single group of people with a common language, territory and set of beliefs that carried the burden of savagism. Frake has stressed that the label 'moro',

³⁹ Stenross to Warren, 8 March 2000.

in the context of the Spanish reconquista, Inquisition and colonialization by Spain of the Philippines, became not only a religious label but an ethnic one as well, a label for a social identity and character to which defamatory behaviours and traits were ascribed.⁴⁰ By the repeated use of the appellation and the accusation, Spanish administrators and friars and English empire builders and literary figures like Joseph Conrad, framed the Islamized inhabitants of Sulu and Mindanao as dangerous fanatical 'rovers' – Muslim pirates – who transgressed local–regional borders and boundaries, boundaries only recently forcibly imposed and maintained by the colonial powers. The Spanish and British used the labels 'Moro' and 'Illanun' to obscure the nature and extent of internal ethnic differentiation that existed in the Sulu–Mindanao region. This view of the history of the Iranun was once orthodoxy; it is now under challenge. There was no fixed 'Iranun' identity prior to the imposition of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century. The formation and maintenance of their ethnicity was continually in flux because of competing forms of social organization and discontinuities in space and time, caused by their integration into the global economy in Asia and fearful rise to regional prominence.

References

Official Records

Great Britain:

Admiralty Records 125/133 – Sulu Piracy.

Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1852, Vol. XXXI [1538], p. 473, Borneo Piracy.

Records of the East India Company: Straits Settlement Factory Records – 1791.

Books and Articles

Allen, Jerry, *The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad*, London: Methuen, 1967.

Barnes, Robert, *Sea Hunters of Indonesia: Fishers and Weavers of Lamalera*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Barrantes, Vicente, *Guerras Piraticas de Filipinas contra Mindanaos y Joloanos*, Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel H. Hernandez, 1878.

Belcher, Edward, *Narrative of the Voyage of HMS Samarang, during the Years 1843–1846*, 2 vols, London: Reeve, Benham and Reeve, 1848.

Bernaldez, Emilio, *Resana historico de la guerra a Sur de Filipinas, sostenida por las armas Espanoles contra los piratas de aquel archipelago, desde la conquista hasta nuestros dias*, Madrid: Imprenta del Memorial de Ingenieros, 1857.

Blusse, Leonard, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, Dordrecht: KITLV, 1986.

Bonney, R., *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Boxer, Charles, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*, London: Penguin, 1973.

⁴⁰ Frake, 'The Genesis of Kinds of People', p. 314.

- Clodd, H. P., *Malaya's First British Pioneer: The Life of Francis Light*, London, 1948.
- Conrad, Joseph, *Almayers Folly*, London: Penguin, 1976.
- , *An Outcast of the Islands*, London: Penguin, 1975.
- , *The Rescue*, London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1924.
- Cullinane, Michael and Xenos, Peter, 'The Growth of Population in Cebu during the Spanish Era: Constructing a Regional Demography from Local Sources', in Daniel Doepfers and Peter Xenos (eds.), *Population and History: The Demographic Origins of the Modern Philippines*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1998, pp. 71–138.
- Fernandez, Pablo O. P., *History of the Church in the Philippines 1521–1898*, Manila: National Book Store, 1979.
- Frake, Charles O., 'Abu Sayyaf Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities among Philippine Muslims', *American Anthropologist*, 100(1), 1998, pp. 41–54.
- , 'The Genesis of Kinds of People in the Sulu Archipelago', in *Language and Cultural Description*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980, pp. 314–18.
- Furber, Holden, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951.
- Glamman, Kristof, *Dutch Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1958.
- Greenberg, Michael, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–1842*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- Heersink, Christiaan, 'Environmental Adaptations in Southern Sulawesi', in Victor T. King (ed.), *Environmental Challenges in South-East Asia*, London: Curzon, 1988, pp. 95–120.
- Keppel, Henry, *The Expedition to Borneo of HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy, With Extracts from the Journal of James Brooke, Esq., of Sarawak*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, London: Chapman and Hall, 1847.
- Mallari, Francisco, 'Muslim Raids in Bicol 1580–1792', *Philippine Studies*, 34, 1986, p. 257.
- , *Vignettes of Bicol History*, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1999.
- Montero y Vidal, Jose, *Historia de la Pirateria Malayo Mahometano en Mindanao, Jolo y Borneo*, 2 vols, Madrid: Imprenta de M. Tello, 1888.
- Mundy, Rodney, *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes down to the Occupation of Labuan, from the Journals of James Brooke, esq., Together with a Narrative of the Operations of HMS Iris by Capt. Rodney Mundy, RN*, London: John Murray, 1848.
- Owen, Norman G., *Prosperity Without Progress: Manila Hemp and Material Life in the Colonial Philippines*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Parrish, Cécile, *The Image of Asia in Children's Literature 1814–1964*, Melbourne: Monash University, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1977.
- Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, *Tuhfat Al-Nafis*, translated and annotated by Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya as *The Precious Gift*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Raskin, Jonah, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, New York: Delta, 1978.

- Resink, G. J., 'The Eastern Archipelago under Joseph Conrad's Western Eyes', in G. J. Resink (ed.), *Indonesia's History between the Myths: Essays in Legal and Historical Theory*, The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1968.
- Rutter, Owen, *The Pirate Wind: Tales of the Sea-Robbers of Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986; first published 1930.
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Sandin, Benedict, *The Sea Dayaks of Borneo before White Rajah Rule*, London: Macmillan, 1967.
- Sherry, Norman, *Conrad's Eastern Sea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Singh, S. B., *European Agency Houses in Bengal 1783–1833*, Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966.
- Southon, Michael, *The Navel of the Perahu: Meaning and Values in the Maritime Trading Economy of a Butonese Village*, Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, 1995.
- Tarling, Nicholas, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Donald Moore, 1963.
- Warren, James Francis, 'Balambangan and the Rise of the Sulu Sultanate 1772–1775', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 50(1), 1977, pp. 73–93.
- , 'Joseph Conrad's Fiction as Southeast Asian History: Trade and Politics in East Borneo in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Brunei Museum Journal*, 1977, pp. 21–34.
- , 'Sino-Sulu Trade in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Philippine Studies*, 25, 1977, pp. 50–79.
- , *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981.
- , *The Sulu Zone: The World Capital Economy and the Historical Imagination*, Amsterdam: VU University Press/CASA, 1998.