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Tausug Constructs of Leadership

Nefertari Al-Raschid–Arsad¹

ABSTRACT ■ Public notions of Islamic leadership has had a political branding provoked by the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS). The paper argues against these notions and puts forth that the Islamic concept of leadership is fundamentally worship-centred, nurturing, service-oriented, and ethical based on primary sources, literature on Islamic leadership, and oral accounts from a Tausug community in the Sulu archipelago. Tausug constructs of leadership are expressed in figurative and symbolic terms, either evoking the Islamic qualities of leadership or alluding to the all-encompassing responsibility expected of a leader.

KEYWORDS ■ Islamic leadership, constructs of leadership, *khalifah*, worship-centric leadership, ethical leadership, Tausugs



Introduction

Popular consciousness has been engulfed in the issue of the reestablished caliphate as declared by the Islamic State (ISIS)² over lands of Syria and Iraq in June 2014. Public awareness on the caliphate has been fed by media reporting (such as from *BBC News* (2015); Fallows (2015); Lynch (2015); Wood (2015); Jeffrey (2016); Ling and Noël (2016); Lister (2016); and Nakhoul (2016)) and policy papers (e.g., Hegghammer (2014); Bunzel (2015); Lynch (2015); Malik (2015); Masi (2015); Orlowski (2015); and Middle East Policy

¹ Assistant Professor, Institute of Islamic Studies, UP Diliman • Email address: naarsad@up.edu.ph

² Also known as Daesh or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant)

Council (2016)). By nature of its reemergence in public consciousness and by the nearest historical model it evokes (the Ottoman caliphate),³ the idea of the caliph and its institutional counterpart, the caliphate, has gained prominence with a definite political branding. The highly politicized idea of the caliphate vis-à-vis leadership does not negate the fact that there is indeed a fundamental aspect to the term which demonstrates that leadership in Islam is not necessarily confined to the political domain. This current representation, however, impacts understandings of Islamic leadership all over the world. This paper examines such understandings in the context of Muslims in the Philippines, particularly for the Tausug in the Sulu archipelago. More specifically, it asks the question: To which ideal of leadership do Tausugs subscribe to? The paper examines Tausug constructs of leadership obtained from oral accounts of a cohort of Tausug people. It will potentially impact governance policies and resulting mechanisms for multicultural communities with significant Muslim populations.

Muslims and Philippine governance

Muslims in the Philippines are an assertive minority in a Christian-majority country, with a history of leadership in the form of sultanates (Saleeby 1963) before they were assimilated into the Philippine national polity. Originally from a diverse ethnic population found in Mindanao and Sulu, the Muslim demographic has been increasing, owing to population growth and conversions to Islam. The Muslim struggle against the imperialistic overtures of Spain and America (Majul 1966; Stephens 2011) gave birth to protracted armed resistance that on one end steadfastly refused Philippine governance (Majul 1976; Harber 1998), and on the other, advocated for Muslim reestablishment and the right to self-rule (Tan 2000).⁴ Philippine leaders have since institutionalized governing frameworks and organizations to

³ The Ottoman caliphate in present-day Turkey was abolished in 1924, becoming the last of this form of government.

⁴ Such a petition may be seen in a letter of Moro leaders to Major General Leonard Wood, governor of Moro Province.

neutralize resistance and provide space for Muslims to assimilate into Philippine society (Majul 1976; Stephens 2011; Oliveros 2013). The aforementioned initiatives have succeeded to an extent, as more Muslims participate in varying levels of public life. It is important to note, however, that Islamic identity, ties of brotherhood to the Muslim world (Majul 1976), and a strong predisposition to its influences, not to mention other cultural factors, are a compelling force of unity among Muslims.

While the caliphate was never established in the Philippines, the Sulu and Maguindanao sultanates ruled over Muslim lands until the institution's disenfranchisement during the American era. This history of leadership and sovereignty remains strong in the collective imagination of Muslims in the Philippines. It has served as a rallying point for Muslim groups to assert for socio-political independence as evidenced by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), among others. The revivalist nature of other movements in the Muslim world finds parallels in the Philippines where calls for self-determination have not ceased and the assertion of Islam as a life system grows in prominence. The Marcos-era Office of the Regional Commission (1975), the Lupong Tagapagpaganap (1979), the 1989 Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the 1996 Final Peace Agreement which expanded the ARMM, and the current Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) established under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2019 are the responses of the government to such assertions for self-governance.

Muslim leadership and the *khalifah* methodology

A Muslim's concept of leadership is anchored on the persona of the vicegerent/trustee/steward on earth, the Arabic counterpart of which is the *khalifah*, or caliph. In this idea, man is assigned a station over and above other creations. This status accords him a degree of leadership which encompasses both the spiritual and material, to be fulfilled in his earthly life. The Qur'an is the primary source of knowledge and guidance for Muslims elaborating on man's creation as vicegerent (Qur'an 2:30). The verse is situated in the dialogue between God

and the angels where He announces His intent to place an inheritor on earth. This statement was met by a question from the angels, as they imply the negative side in man's nature that would cause him to "spread corruption thereon (earth) and shed blood" (Qur'an 2:30). God illustrates His wisdom in the succeeding verses (Qur'an 2:31–34), where Adam, being "taught all the names," manifests his special rank among God's creations. The Muslims' holy book further details man's purpose on earth as *khalifah*, and more specifically, the ways in which he is expected to carry out this purpose. Worldview, expressions of worship, laws, and lifestyle are detailed for man's guidance. The adherence to these guidelines constitutes *khalifah* behavior. Behavioral prescriptions in the Qur'an are the foundations for the *khalifah* frame of leadership. Muslims adhere to the belief that throughout human history, the Abrahamic prophets were chosen to lead their respective communities towards guidance and obedience to divine precepts in the form of doing good, prayers, alms-giving and service to God (Qur'an 21:73).

Ahmad and Ogunsola (2011, 294) appreciate *khalifah* leadership specifically to "implement Allah's laws on earth." ElKaleh and Samier (2013, 196) affirm that this entailed "self-denial and dedication" in service and the "establishment of Islamic principles and values." Qur'anic verses affirm trusteeship as upholding justice and veering away from vain desire (Qur'an 38:26). Al Najjār (2000) avers that the *khalifah* methodology involves a complementary relationship between revelation and reason. Being a *khalifah* is man's essential assignment, and its rationale is to implement Allah's will on earth. Undertaking this assignment is also the means for man to perfect his worship of Allah. Man's intellect and rational faculties are necessary to carry out the functions of trusteeship. These should be used to understand Qur'anic revelation and apply Islamic principles to respond to everyday life issues and situations. Accordingly, the essence of *khalifah* is the perfection of the human self through interaction with the universe.

Mohammad Zaidi Ismail (2010) defines Islamic leadership as the practice of deputizing for God to establish His will on earth. Ismail further proposes a concurring thought with particular emphasis on the achievement of a good and noble end result. Ismail emphasizes that in

deputizing for God on earth, man is enjoined to emulate His attributes. Thus, governance is anchored on the principles of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah* or traditions. This is similar to al'Mahdi's (2004) contention that man's dominion over things are only as far as God allows. Man has no authority independent of God's will.

Similarly, Asad (2005) asserted that the goal of man's life is to establish and sustain the conditions that will enable self and society to develop "moral stamina." On this account, whatever form or function of leadership a person may assume should be guided by this moral compass. In a more practical vein, the process of leadership necessitates the unified application of thinking and action towards a praiseworthy outcome (Ismail 2010).

Hassan et al. (2011) propose a conceptual framework of Islamic leadership that is foremost value-based, drawing on a necessary integration of Islamic core values and work-oriented values. They argue that a successful integration of the two sets of values and their internalization by a leader establishes his authority and influence, or in their words, "leadership legitimacy." Ismaeel and Blaim (2012, 1091), meanwhile, emphasize the organic nature of *khalifah*: "The concept of *khalifa* is the basis for human existence and consequently for their ethical commitment according to Islamic teachings. Whenever a Muslim behaves as a vicegerent, he/she is performing an act of worship." Umari (2008, 22–26) elaborated on a fifteen-point thesis that Islam is innately oriented towards social service:

- (1) It is innate in man's nature to serve, which is strengthened by the quality of one's spirituality.
- (2) Prophets and religious scriptures through time have consistently advocated for social service, which the Prophet Muhammad particularly exemplified.⁵
- (3) Social service in Islam is embodied in worship.
- (4) Service in Islam is inclusive of all humanity.

⁵ Examples are the establishment of obligatory poor dues and charity, and the abolition of slavery, among others.

- (5) Service, particularly in the form of poor dues (*zakat*) and charity, is guided by recipient categorization.
- (6) Service may be given in various ways, ranging from material assistance to menial service, compassion, and guidance.
- (7) Service, in whatever form afforded, is incumbent upon every individual.
- (8) Individuals are enjoined to offer sustainable solutions to the needy.
- (9) The sayings of the Prophet Muhammad have detailed the various forms of service from which more contemporary forms may be envisioned.
- (10) Islam encourages and provides guidelines for the giving of endowments.
- (11) Islam promotes the establishment of social service institutions.
- (12) Social service in Islam adheres to a particular order and rationale of recipient prioritization.
- (13) Islam seeks to obliterate social divides.
- (14) Social service in Islam is part of faith.
- (15) Social service is acceptable if given with sincerity and divine devotion.

Khan (1998, ix) defines *khalifah* from Islamic legal thought as “the person who holds the delegated authority to enforce the Islamic law and religion (Shari’a) in an Islamic state on the one hand and who is the sole executive authority on the other.” Further, the caliph is both temporal ruler and defender of the faith, hence the title *Amirul-Mu’minin* or “leader of the believers.” Khan (1998, x) points to the Qur’an as explicit reference on the institution of *khalifah*, particularly the rightly-guided caliphate. The institutionalization of the caliphate as a formal office of authority transpired when the death of the Prophet Muhammad effected a leadership vacuum in the Muslim *ummah* (Moten 2011). Abu Bakar As-Siddiq, Umar ibn Al Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn AbiTalib subsequently led the *ummah* and came

to be referred to as the four “rightly guided caliphs” of Islam. Muslim writers note that the Prophet did not explicitly prescribe a method of leadership succession (As-Suyuti 1888; Asad 1980; Khan 1998), more so a singular pattern by which an Islamic state should be formed (Asad 1980). The proof of history lies in the way the rightly guided caliphs came to leadership and respectively ruled over the people (As-Suyuti 1888; Asad 1980; Khan 1998; Bakar 2011; Moten 2011). The character of the caliphate during the four caliphs’ reign was indeed a time when spiritual eminence was highly regarded as a foundation of leadership.

The idea of *khalifah* is clearly expressed within the personal, private domain of individuals. It is typified by adherence to the commandments of God and obedience to His divine precepts. The commandments involve undertaking individual responsibility and accountability for one’s actions and for the rest of the world. There is also the understanding that in being *khalifah*, spirituality and the constant adherence to a high standard of character and morality is essential. *Khalifah*, from this particular frame, initiates from the personal, private domain and correspondingly flows out to encompass the public domain in a consistent manner.

The standards of Islamic leadership are explicitly stated in the primary sources of Islamic law, the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. The same have been elucidated in a number of classic and contemporary resources some of which are aforementioned. It is therefore a point of interest of this paper how Muslims of a particular cohort in Southern Philippines construct the leadership ideal.

The Sulu archipelago

The Sulu archipelago, encompassing Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi (ZAMBASULTA), is home to a number of ethnolinguistic groups which came under the aegis of the Sulu sultanate. The Tausug, the variant Sama subgroups, and the Yakan peoples share a common super-structure of history, religious norms, cultural habits, and language and literacy under this “Sulu nation,” in spite their respective

core identities and characteristics. The lingua franca was Bahasa Sug⁶ and its written form was *jawi*,⁷ a localized form of Arabic adopted to accommodate the native tongue. Bahasa Sug was the language used to spread Islam in the areas under the Sulu Sultanate's sphere of influence, which scoped the ZAMBASULTA, Palawan, some parts of Central Mindanao, and Sabah. The archipelago has had a long experience of leadership and governance through the Sulu sultanate. The Sulu sultans received the pledge of allegiance called *bay'ah* from loyal subjects who either served them directly as vassals or as autonomous agents, allies, or as peoples under their aegis and sphere of power. The sultanate's form of governance was at one end characterized by the universal form of leadership, encompassing both spiritual and temporal affairs and the dynastic form. Subsequent forms of leadership after the sultanate nevertheless evoked the same leader-follower relationship where allegiance was pledged.

Tausug constructs of leadership

This paper is delimited to Tausug conceptions of leadership, particularly obtained from firsthand oral accounts of residents of Bangas, a rural island community in the outskirts of Jolo proper, the capital of Sulu province. Constructs of leadership are expressed in figurative and symbolic terms, which vividly convey not only idea of an ideal leadership but expectations of it. Some explicitly evoke the Islamic qualities of leadership, while others allude to the all-encompassing role of steward of the public domain that is nonetheless evocative of the *khalifah*. Tausug constructs of leadership educe the typologies of role model, steward/provider of direction, and elder/nurturer, while others refer more to the range of responsibility expected of a leader. The constructs below are expressed in Bahasa Sug with their English translations:

⁶ This literally translates to "the Tausug language." Another recognized term for the language is *Sinug*.

⁷ *Jawi* is similarly the term for the Malay script of Malaysia. *Jawi* was used for official correspondence of both the Sulu and Maguindanao sultanates (See Samuel K. Tan et al.'s *Jawi Documentary Series (1996–2007)* published by the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies). The Meranao counterpart of the *jawi* is the *kerim*.

Role model

In pagnakura muna-muna, subay siya suntuan, subay awun sipat manusiya adil, mabuntul, bukun putingan.

(First of all, a leader should be a role model. He should have the attributes of justice and righteousness and one who is not a liar.)

The construct enumerates three particular qualities of a role model: justice, righteousness, and honesty. Of the three, righteousness has composite meanings that are referenced from the Qur'an (2:177):

True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west—but the truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day; and the angels, and revelation, and the prophets; and spends his substance—however much he himself may cherish—it—upon his near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; and is constant in prayer, and renders the purifying dues; and [truly pious are] they who keep their promises whenever they promise, and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in time of peril: it is they that have proved themselves true, and it is they, they who are conscious of God.

The above elucidations of the construct point to an expectation of the leader's adherence to a core set of beliefs, charity, forbearance and worshipfulness. The constructs of justice and honesty add the dimension of ethical behavior into this description.

In pag-iyannun nakura, pag ta papanawun in malawum, mahunit in pagnakura pagbahasahun. Kita in mangakuhi sin kalakkuan sin mga rasul ha 3 parkala: kaadilan, iyaatud in hula iban rakyat.

(If we talk about leaders in depth, leadership is a difficult thing. We take upon ourselves the total behavior of the

prophets on three aspects: uphold justice, oversee the place and the people.)

The construct references prophetic behavior as the pattern by which leaders should act, specifically in the aspects of upholding justice and looking over the community and the people. Emulating the character and behavior of the Prophet Muhammad is enjoined among Muslims. The examples of other prophets are studied as well. One can glean from the above leadership definition that the prophets commonly embodied justice and “parent-like” oversight towards the community and its people.

Steward/elder

Stewardship or an elder status is assigned as the overarching theme of three related constructs.

Nagtatau-maas (Fulfilling the role of elder)

The term *nagtatau maas* translates to someone who is dependable and whose community demeanor is highly regarded and which members distinguish and value. A *tau maas* or elder has an innate concern for the community and voluntarily takes on responsibility. Recognition of a community elder is inherently given by the community based on moral integrity, expanse of wisdom, and character. The leadership role conferred in no way relies on the formal authority structure which contemporary societies adhere to today.

Nagdaraa uhan bang ha bangka (Takes the prow of the boat/ is the captain of the boat)

In Tausug motor boat-riding, the person stationed at the prow navigates direction and negotiates through the waterways. He wields a long pole or oar which he uses to move the boat through rocky shallows onto the deep, underneath, or between houses on stilts or through agar-agar plantations or fish traps. He indicates when the boat has finally reached the deep level and a clear waterway, thereby

giving the signal to turn on its engine. When the engine starts running, the “captain” steers the boat to the path towards their destination while keeping an eye on the currents, approaching vehicles or potential obstacles along the waterway. The captain of the boat symbolism conveys how a leader takes the chief role in providing direction in community affairs. It reflects the particular way of life of people in the Sulu archipelago—they live by the sea, derive a source of livelihood from it, or use its waterways to go places.

Compared to the previous description, the following construct has a generic cast and bears similarities with one conventional definition of leadership—that of initiator and influencer.

Siya na in pangindaraahan, siya in magnakura ha katan pakarajaan (He is the initiator, influencer; he is the leader in all affairs)

Initiators and influencers are expected to engage people in the realms of ideas and action. However, in the Tausug context, the term *pangindaraahan* explicitly refers to a person of action. Thus, mobilization in all affairs is more physical, though it does not necessarily exclude influence in other aspects.

Within the scope of being a steward or elder, two accounts similarly evoke a conventional leadership definition:

Unu-unu in hikaraway, magnakura (Lead towards what is good); and

In nakura magdaa tau ha hikaraway (A leader leads his people towards what is good/beneficial)

The term *hikaraway* in Bahasa Sug, while literally translating to “towards what is good,” conveys double meanings: what leads to righteousness and what is beneficial. The first meaning sees a leader as provider of moral and ethical direction, presumably in both the private and public spaces, given the leader’s reach of nurturing and stewardship in this particular context. The second meaning may be a definition more immediately expected in the public space. Goodness

here is more function-specific, more work-related and definitely with tangibly beneficial results. This point of view calls to mind Ciulla's (1995; 2014) definition of good which denotes both ethics and effectiveness as she argued for ethics as the "heart" or the center of leadership.

Nurturer

Similar to the steward and elder, the construct of nurturer is assigned as the overarching theme to similar constructs.

Inah, amah ha kawman; karaganan sin tau (Mother, father in the community, to whom people can run to (for help))

Allusion to the leader as the community's parent indicates an all-encompassing function and depth of trust and dependence by the people. The parent has a focal position in the community whose presence is expected to lend strength and guidance. A paternal/maternal form of leadership is likewise expected to respond to all kinds of needs that may arise in the community. This definition evokes a closer relation than an elder because here, other needs apart from guidance are expected to be fulfilled by the "parent." This relationship is similarly evoked in two other constructs:

Unu-unu in problema, amu in magsilbi kanila, makatabang (Whatever the problem, the one who serves them, the one who can help)

In nakura makatabang ha tau, makapahayang-hayang kanila (A leader has the capacity to help people and provide them ease)

In the latter construct, there is an added nuance to leadership—that of capacity. Here, the capacity is directed towards nurturing followers in the two ways mentioned. Helping people will take on a broad frame, if we relate it to the previously expressed construct (whatever problem, the one who serves them, the one who can help). Help will come in tangible and intangible ways, which is true for the term

makapahayang-hayang as well. Provision of ease does not refer only to the securing of physical comforts. One will find ease in the mind and the heart, which are intangible states that are nevertheless real and no doubt essential to a person. These can be mutually exclusive in relation to physical ease, which is tangible. After all, physical ease may be present without the intangible forms and vice versa. Having said this, one can imagine the expanse of the term “ease” and the expanse of capacity expected of the leader in order to ensure the presence of this state to followers.

Nagjajaga sin hula/lumiling ha ra'yat/mata-taynga sin hula
(Guards the homeland/the one who oversees the people/the eyes and ears of the place)

The four constructs may be expressed in different ways but have close, if not overlapping, meanings of varying depths. They particularly represent leaders as persons with oversight and nurturing functions in the community. A leader is expected to have appreciation of anything and everything that impacts the community.

Scope of responsibility

Three related constructs allude particularly to leader scope of responsibility. All are expressed using contrasts to impress on the distinctive idea of leadership.

Iyuulinan in haggut-pasu (Handles the hot and cold)

Figuratively, the term means handles the easy and the difficult situation; it pertains to an all-weather leader. The contrasts of hot and cold highlight the breadth, even depth, of the leader’s concern and accountability. Hot and cold refer to both the positive and adverse aspects of community experience and conditions.

In mangi, marayaw parasahan (Is present during the good and the bad)

The term reflects on a leader who oversees the good and bad conditions of the community. This is another play on contrasts akin to the expression *iyuulinan* in *haggut-pasu* both in form and meaning. The leader is expected to engage any and all community experiences or conditions no matter their nature.

Unu-unu problema manahut-maaslag, siya in karaganan namu
(Whatever problem, big or small, the one we could run to)

Nakura ha katan, way bidda' (Leader in everything, no distinction, preferences)

The term *manahut-maaslag* is a Bahasa Sug compound word that, similar to the preceding constructs, underscores range of responsibility and impresses the breadth of the leadership function. The use of contrasts in this particular cluster of leadership definitions—hot and cold, bad and good, big and small—is a powerful way of accentuating the nuances involved in leadership, similar to the prow of the boat imagery. The latter construct, while not using comparative metaphors, reinforces the impression of breadth—without a doubt disclaiming distinction or preference in functions dispensed. Definitely, all responsibilities are embraced.

The constructs significantly dovetail with earlier figurative definitions of leadership: steward/elder, parent, nurturer, and overseer of all affairs. Overall, one forms a mental image of a leader whose responsibilities and capacity of caring/concern provides an incredible cushion of security to constituents. This security is akin to what one typically enjoys with one's parents. Importantly, the leadership ideal is imbued with moral ascendancy expectations reflective of the ethical and character-centered model of Islamic leadership.

Tausug leadership constructs vis-à-vis conventional leadership typology

Assessing the constructs according to conventional leadership typology, one finds an eclectic mix of ethical and servant leadership qualities. Ethical leadership is defined as actions of assistance, guidance and

influence towards shared goals through “morally-acceptable ways” (Oates and Dalmau 2013, 20–21). Ciulla (1995, 13; 2014, xvii) imagines this typology as founded on an “etymology of good” which is both ethical (morally good) and effective (technically good). Tausug constructs find correspondence with these concepts from the premium on justice, honesty, and being a good example evocative of prophetic behavior. The constructs are more explicit on moral goodness. Servant leadership was first articulated by Greenleaf (1977) as the calling to serve, first and foremost. This necessarily precedes the call to leadership, distinctive from the more typical “leadership first, service next” progression. Servant leadership is focused on attending to other’s needs rather than one’s own. To do otherwise would negate the vocation of service. Spears (1995) derived ten major traits of servant leaders from Greenleaf’s framework: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Tausug leadership constructs affirm servant leadership because of stewardship, all-embracing altruism, empathy and nurturing, and not to mention, the depth and breadth of service expected.

The above observations find parallels with earlier studies comparing Islamic and conventional leadership typologies (Arsad 2018). The character-centeredness of Islamic leadership is analogous to service orientation, intrinsic virtue, highly ethical behavior, follower focus, and motivation to transcend self for the greater cause common to ethical, authentic, servant, and transformational leadership (Beekun 2012). ElKaleh and Samier (2013) discern “service devotion and self-denial” in the course of bringing about the practice of Islamic ethics, thus its intersection with the servant-guardian leadership frame. Al Sarhi et al. (2014) posits that the Islamic leadership principles of justice, fairness, consultation, tolerance, honesty, kindness, empathy, patience, and compassion are significantly correspondent with the servant, transformational, and transcendental frames. Transformational leadership envisions a figure of authority as having inspirational ideals which positively influence followers and organizational relationships towards shared goals sans self-interest (Bensimon et al. 1989). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) qualify “authentic transformational” leadership as that concerned with those positive influences, as opposed to its “pseudo-transformational”

counterpart associated with leaders who, with their charisma and persuasion, lead their followers to acts of malice or malevolence. Similar to the authentic transformational leader, the transcendental leader is people-focused, concerned with their followers development in the personal and public sphere; the latter sphere inspiring them to service for others and contribute to a cause greater than themselves (Cardona 2000).

Bahasa Sug figurative language

The Tausugs' deployment of symbolism, figurative language, and play of contrasts in expressing conceptions of leadership indicates a capacity of language that is both simplistic yet sophisticated. The symbolisms used in the accounts "takes the prow of the boat" and "handles the hot and the cold" coaxes vivid mental pictures, and not to mention provokes a nuanced view of leadership from the lens of oral account bearers. Figurative language is deployed in the "mother/father" and "eyes and ears of the community" metaphors. The play of contrasts, meanwhile, is apparent in the "hot-cold," "big-small," and "good-bad" cluster of constructs. Tausug figurative language is expectedly contextual.

Bahasa Sug is replete with words and phrases that hold both a literal and figurative meaning, much like other lingua franca such as English and Arabic. *Sumangsang sug*, for example, literally means "go against the current," which reflects the context of a coast-dwelling and boat-riding society. While the action is illogical and improbable, it is nevertheless performed, albeit rarely. Figuratively, the phrase represents iconoclastic action that is, going against popular opinion, positions, or norms.

The Bahasa Sug language as an oral literature is yet a vastly unexplored area of research, along with varied forms of Tausug oral literature: *tarasul iban daman* (poetic dialogue), *tigum-tigum* (riddles), *dundang* (lullabies), *lugu* (narrative chants), and *qissah* (stories or narrations). Orality and oral knowledge transmission are highly regarded in Tausug society; thus, oral literature remains a strong source of information and entertainment among the Tausug people,

especially in the rural communities. Sulu archipelago orature⁸ are considered highly-valued and are thus protected by certain protocols and gate-keeping measures, ensuring their transmission not just to “society insiders,” but more importantly, to those well-deserving of the knowledge they bear. It is clear to the human repositories of oral literature that knowledge cannot be parceled out indiscriminately, nor will it be readily available to anyone. Knowledge, after all, is a treasure, and this treasure is protected and awarded only to the deserving. Further, it is essential to point out that Tausug orality is founded on a distinct philosophical framework that requires its own space to render functionality to Muslim institutions.

Policy implications

The research on Tausug leadership constructs bears policy implications in two collective domains: governance and public administration; and language and education.

Governance and public administration

Tausugs respect and positively respond to leadership that is character-centered, nurturing and inclusive in its attention to its constituents. Expressed constructs do not in any way point to the stern and strongman-like leadership typology that is oft-portrayed in literature on the 2014 declared caliphate. The latter has been attributed as adhering to an understanding of Islam from strict interpretations. While the former and latter societies are both Muslim, the leadership ideals they profess are vastly divergent. What this implies is that there is no single, homogenous typology of leadership in the Muslim world outside of the worship-centered, moral, and character-focused ideal that is the *khalifah* detailed in the Qur’an, which is ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad and was emulated by the four caliphs succeeding him. Not surprisingly, the caliphs had notably different personalities. Their individual qualities led them to demonstrate styles of leadership

⁸ This is another term for oral literature, though it is not widely used.

that are distinct from each other, even as they modeled the Islamic leadership ideal.

Leadership constructs are context-laden as well. The milieu of this particular Tausug cohort is peaceful and laid-back, residing in an island society far removed from Sulu's socio-political hub despite its proximity. The context may be quite different across the sea in the mainland, which, apart from being front and center of Tausug society, is where military policy and actions are strong and collateral damage from the unrelenting armed encounters is keenly felt. It is necessary to reflect whether the Tausugs living within a highly-militarized zone and prone to surges of violence, repeated displacements, and a recurring climate of both instability and insecurity hold disparate expectations of leadership. Will they be attracted to a leader figure who would navigate them through the prolonged circumstances of difficulty and disorder they experience? What manner of navigation will this be? Will these protractedly adverse circumstances be a dangerous prod towards a leadership ideal that veers toward the extreme? At this point, it could be a reflexive exercise. However, we could not and should not rest on uncomfortable possibilities.

Policies are meaningful when they are informed by a genuine understanding of the constituents they govern and the circumstances they address. They would not be valid otherwise. Sulu has long been denigrated for the apparent failure of peace and order within its territory and its people continue to pay the price. The Philippines itself has suffered from the enormous drain on resources engendered by continued military campaigns in the provinces—actions that never solved the problem. An honest effort to analyze Sulu's constituents and the province's context and interplaying forces, rather than taking the default stand—that is, overbroad allegations of terrorism and wide-scale rebellion—and its ensuing policy of sustained militarization, may better serve peace and development endeavors of the country.

The same attempt should be done towards multicultural communities with significant Muslim, and even indigenous, populations. Their heterogeneous ethnolinguistic composition, varied socio-political and cultural heritage, and diverse contexts need well-calibrated responses if genuine progress is truly wished for the

Philippine national polity. In this respect, the multicultural education core values of “acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, respect for human dignity and universal human rights” (Bennett 2003, 16–17), among others, is a necessary state policy that needs to be translated into feasible and effective programs. An attitude of mutual equity and respect, rather than the inclination towards “othering,” is worth investing our collective energies into.

Language and education

The archipelagic topography of the Philippines and its placement within the Malay archipelago has rendered the Philippines a country of diverse cultures and languages, with the latter approximated to be at 170 or more. Bahasa Sug is a living language as it is widely used across the Sulu archipelago, mainly as everyday language. Living languages, among other forms, are classified as oral literature by the World Oral Literature Project (n.d.). Unfortunately, some of these living languages are considered to be endangered owing to changes in cultural practices and lifestyles. Languages, after all, serve as vehicles for transmission of cultural knowledge. The Project predicts that approximately half of the over 6,000 living languages in the world will be extinct (*ibid.*).

Bahasa Sug is one of nineteen Philippine languages that are currently used by the Department of Education (DepEd) in its Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB–MLE) policy, whose implementation is a critical feature of the Enhanced Basic Education Program.⁹ It is speculated that the language’s inclusion in the MTB–MLE may have been based on the following considerations:

- (1) Bahasa Sug is the language of the Tausug, one of the major ethnolinguistic Muslim groups in the Philippines;

⁹ See Department of Education, “Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE),” DepEd Order 74, s. 2009, at <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2009/07/14/do-74-s-2009-institutionalizing-mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-mle/>; see also Department of Education, “Mother Tongue-Based Learning Makes Lessons More Interactive and Easier for Students” (Press Release), October 24, 2016, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2016/10/24/mother-tongue-based-learning-makes-lessons-more-interactive-and-easier-for-students/14/>.

- (2) The language remains to be known and spoken in the ZAMBASULTA by other ethnolinguistic groups as the Sama, Yakan, and Kalibugan, whose ancestors were once under the jurisdiction of the Sulu Sultanate; thus, while these groups communicate in their respective first languages, Bahasa Sug is nevertheless utilized; and
- (3) Tausug displacement and migration from Sulu to nearby provinces since Jolo's burning in the early 1970s and the inexorable military encounters in subsequent decades have seen an increase of Bahasa Sug-speaking communities in these locales.

Public schools with considerable Muslim populations in the ZAMBASULTA locales may well find that their students represent multiple ethnolinguistic groups, of which a significant size being Tausug. The implications of this on the MTB–MLE is clear. Authentic demographic profiles of communities are necessary to locate ethnolinguistic compositions, first and auxiliary languages, and socio-cultural factors that impact varied student learning processes. The community profiles shall serve as vital inputs towards the setting of both starting and endpoints of community education programs. These in turn shall provide the foundations for the crafting of realistic, responsive, and inclusive curricula. The measure invariably supports the DepEd's vision of having "no child left behind" in the education continuum. It equally lessens the influence of majority-minority politics on which mother tongue/s are officially recognized in locales with multicultural populations. Llaneta (2018) argues for imbuing teachers with competencies for undertaking "linguistic and cultural analyses" in their respective schools, in order to prepare them better for a multicultural and multilingual learning milieu. The recommendations are simply the beginning of multitudes of tasks to buttress the MTB–MLE program towards realizing true education for all.

Llaneta's (2018) proposal affirms Alangui's (1997, 68) research on indigenous knowledge content, learning institutions, and strategies for knowledge transmission conducted among the Kankana-ey tribe in Bauko, Mountain Province. The study accentuated the importance

of restructuring educational programs especially in indigenous communities for several fundamental reasons:

- (1) Curriculum may not be consistent with community life;
- (2) Contents and modes of teaching in these communities may prove more effective; and
- (3) Education programs sensitive to community life are more acceptable to the people.

The imperative of critically assessing the needs of target communities and promoting deeper conversation between development planners and the communities themselves cannot be overemphasized.

Finally, oral traditions are a rich resource of indigenous wisdom that speaks of a people's collective consciousness and worldview. They rationalize how people think and act and therefore provide a window for strengthened intercultural understanding. The study underscores the dearth in appreciation of indigenous knowledge in the face of more dominant sources of knowledge and ways of knowing and living that have pervaded indigenous societies through established, popular, and far-reaching media forms. While no criticism is leveled at these sources of knowledge, they do affect a rather constrained view of social realities at a global scale. The study emphasizes that there is a great need to balance the pervasiveness of one dominant culture in popular knowledge by adopting as default—a multicultural standpoint informed by perspectives and wisdom from other and all cultures. This may be done by pushing for policies that would (1) facilitate true conversations with indigenous and minority communities; (2) support research that will substantially supplement the rather limited corpus of indigenous knowledge presently found; and (3) ensure and encourage the multicultural ethos in schools and classrooms with enabling programs targeted at specific stakeholders.

Conclusion

The paper examines leadership constructs derived from oral accounts of Tausugs in an island community in Sulu province. Tausugs define

leadership as having the qualities of a role model, a steward/provider of direction, and a elder/nurturer, with the latter holding eminence among the constructs. The idea of role model is anchored on the example of the Prophet Muhammad, whose form of leadership was understood to be worship-focused, ethical, and character-centered. The Tausug leadership constructs intersect with the ethical and servant leadership typologies found in conventional literature, belying the stern authoritarian image of Muslim leadership popularized by media covering the self-proclaimed ISIS caliph and caliphate since 2014. Tausug leadership constructs are expressed in symbolic and figurative terms that reflect on Bahasa Sug's level of sophistication. Policy insights from this paper favor a rethinking of existing policies in the fields of governance and public administration. It likewise strongly proposes for more inclusive measures in the education sector: first, the enrichment of education initiatives, particularly the MTB–MLE program; and second, the adoption of multicultural education policies and the development of closely corresponding programs that would ultimately impact school curricula, school culture and ethos, personnel and student recruitment and selection, and resource allocation, among others. ■

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Telephone: 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 68 / 8426-0955
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