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CHAPTER 2
Theories of conversion

This chapter revisits some of the most important theories of Islamic and Christian conversions as applied in Indonesia. While recognizing that no single theory could explain these conversions, together or as separate phenomenon, in various time periods and in disparate regions, this chapter summarizes some important theories on Islamic and Christian conversions, which will serve as heuristic lenses for the succeeding narrative chapters. Furthermore, it outlines a theory of conversions in north Sulawesi that complements and completes the existing theories to be discussed. In particular, this chapter emphasizes that the existing theories have marginalized discussion on politics in general and the nuances of local chiefly politics in particular. Finally, it suggests the need to formulate a new thesis to explain both elite and mass conversions.

Anthony H. Johns admonishes that "the sheer diversity and extent of the [Malay-Indonesian] region renders impossible the formulation of any single theory of Islamization, or pattern of Islamic life, or any periodization common to the region as a whole."[1] Likewise, Cesar Majul warns that a "single explanation" for Islamization is "doomed to failure."[2] Azyumardi Azra contends that "the great diversity of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago […] makes it impossible to formulate any single theory of conversion (or Islamization) or any periodization common to the whole region."[3]

However, one could argue that it is all the more necessary to theorize conversion precisely because of the diversity of the region and the different periods in which Islamization and Christianization occurred. The aim is not to present a totalizing and trans-historical definition or explanation, but rather the opposite—to glean the specificities from a putative general pattern—and to emphasize the particular historical contingencies that were consequential to the conversions in north Sulawesi.

This chapter focuses on several relevant theories of Christian and Islamic conversions as they relate to Indonesia in general and north Sulawesi in particular. These theories are labeled as follows: (1) bottom-up theory, (2) expanding theory, (3) comprehensive social

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[1] Anthony H. Johns, "From Coastal Settlement to Islamic School and City: Islamization in Sumatra, The Malay Peninsula and Java," *Hamdard Islamicus* 4, no. 4 (1981): 7.
[2] Cesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia" (paper presented at the Second Biennial Conference, International Association of Historians of Asia, Taipei, October 6-9, 2012, 1962), 340-341.
[3] Azyumardi Azra, "The Coming and Spread of Islam," in *Islam in the Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2006), 5.

crisis theory, (4) missionary theory, (5) trade theory, and (6) marriage theory. While some of these theories may overlap, their explanatory focuses are mutually distinct. What are these theories and what are their limitations vis-a-vis the region in question?

1. Bottom-up theory

A popular explanation to Islamization is what one might call the "bottom-up theory." For instance, the distinguished scholar Syed Hussein Alatas views the rise of Islam in Indonesia as a "revolution from within." He contends that the "conversion of the rulers was not the cause but the result of a preceding process of Islamization."[4] He believes that "it had never been necessary for any ruler to change his religion as long as his subjects did not change theirs."[5] Alatas does not elaborate the notion of a "revolution from within" further but notably points to its immediate trigger—elite "attitude of relaxation and indifference" towards the lower orders that "usually prevails especially when a society has experienced a long period of power and supremacy."[6]

The historian, Christian Pelras, believes that the egalitarian effect of Islam had been a primary reason for the elite's opposition to Islam. Alatas would very likely agree with this idea. Furthermore, Pelras speculates that the Bugis ruler's initial resistance to Islam "may have been related to the egalitarian tendencies of […] commoner Muslim traders, and to the Islamic stress on God's oneness and absolute transcendence […] which could threaten the power of the rulers."[7]

However, evidence from various parts of Indonesia suggests the critical role of the ruling elite in Islamization. [8] Scattered references to slaves converting to Islam to escape

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[4] Syed Hussein Alatas, "On the Need for an Historical Study of Malaysian Islamization," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1963): 79.
[5] Ibid., 80.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Pelras, *The Bugis*, 129.
[8] M. C. Ricklefs, "Six Centuries of Islamization in Java," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (New York and London: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979), 102-103.

slave status do exist,[9] but as Ricklefs points out, Islamic conversion mainly due to the "lure of 'egalitarianism' is almost already debunked."[10]

In various cases in the region, Islam and Christianity were important status-markers, not only to separate elites from commoners, but also to differentiate the elites themselves. For instance, Schoorl argues that conversion to Islam in seventeenth-century Buton by the aristocratic *kaomu* class served primarily to strengthen its claim to supremacy over the competing chiefly *walaka* class through the former's exclusivist claim to the Sufi-inspired notion of *martabat tujuh* (seven ranks).[11] This mystical idea coincided with and legitimized the seven chiefly ranks occupied entirely by the *kaomu*.

This case finds a parallel in Mindanao wherein the marriage and conversion of a local woman to an Arab-descended Syarif Kabungsuan—the reputed bringer of Islam to the island—is believed to have established the exclusive aristocratic descent group (*barabangsa*), which came to constitute the nucleus of the ruling elite.[12] In general, this example feeds into what Anthony Milner has long argued—that "Islamization was […] a process in which South-East Asian rulers came to see their functions and objectives in Muslim terms."[13]

With regard to Christianity, there are studies illustrating that religious conversions originate from and are utilized as a tool by the lower classes. However, these are more commonly found in the literature on areas outside Indonesia.[14] In north Sulawesi, scholars

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[9] In 1786, a Makassarese named Abdul Malik argued before the Council of Justice (Raad van Justitie) in Ternate that his slave-wife "should be dismissed from slavery by virtue of marriage with a Muslim." The Sultan of Ternate endorsed the view that she was already free according to Muslim law, likewise the Company acknowledged that there had been "examples of slave-women becoming free after marriage with Muslims." NA VOC inv. 1.04.02, no. 3759, Gemeene Resolutien Ternate 1787, 22-24.

[10] M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 15. This is an apparent departure from previous romantic notions of conversion in Java. De Graff and Pigeaud, for instance, believe that conversion was due to the attraction to an "international brotherhood regardless of birth, status and race." See H. J. de Graff and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *De Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java: Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 26.

[11] Schoorl, "Islam, Macht en Ontwikkeling in het Sultanaat Buton,"*Islam en Macht: Een historisch-antropologisch perspectief*, 55-56.

[12] Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rebels and Rulers, Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 47-48.

[13] Anthony Milner, "Islam and the Muslim State," in *Islam in South-East Asia*, ed. M. B. Hooker (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 44; see also Milner, *The Malays*, 40; Barbara Watson and Yoneo Ishii Andaya, "Religious Developments in Southeast Asia c. 1500-1800," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 517; Timothy P. Barnard, "The Hajj, Islam, and Power among the Bugis in Early Colonial Riau," in *Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement, and the Longue Durée*, ed. Eric Tagliacozzo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 65-66.

[14] See, for instance, the cases in India and the Caribbean, as a case in point see Mary Turner, "The Colonial State, Religion and the Control of Labour: Jamaica, 1760-1834," in *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History* (Barbados and Gainesville, FL.: The Press University of the West Indies and University Press of Florida, 1999).

point out the opposite—that the chiefly elite converted first, and crucially, as it accorded them political and economic advantages.[15] Nevertheless, the literature is unclear on how different segments of the chiefly elite likely possessed varying interests with regard to conversion. Christian conversions were traditionally regarded less as a form of social liberation than an "instrument to impose their [colonial rulers'] hegemony and facilitate their administration."[16]

Furthermore, in north Sulawesi there is evidence that the aristocratic elite prevented the lower classes, especially the slaves, to access a prestigious Islamic or Christian identity. For instance, the Sangirese elite was intransigent in prohibiting the slave children from attending Christian school and church.[17] A similar attitude among the Islamized chiefly class of Bolaang Mongondow was observed. [18] Members of the Mongondorese aristocratic elite intended to have schools only for themselves. Malay, the official language of official communication, was taught by members of the elite class to fellow elites. Likewise, Arabic was formally learned by members of the ruling class.[19]

2. Expanding horizon theory

Anthony Reid propounds that a "commercial, cosmopolitan, competitive environment" during Southeast Asia's "age of commerce" "drove Southeast Asians to adopt" Islam or Christianity.[20] Drawing inspiration from Robin Horton's thesis on African conversion,[21] Reid contends that

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[15] See M. J. C. Schouten, *Leadership and Social Mobility in a Southeast Asian Society: Minahasa, 1677-1983* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1998); Rita Smith Kipp, "Two Views of the Minahasa; or, Whatever Happened to the Poor, Heathen Bush Natives?" *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 3 (August 2004).
[16] Schouten, "Minahasa (North Sulawesi): The 'Success Story' of Dutch Colonialism in Indonesia "*In Permanent Transit: Discourses and Maps of the Intercultural Experience*, 215.
[17] "Correspondentie en Berigten," *De Vereeniging: Christelijke Stemmen* 21, (1867): 680.
[18] Het Utrechts Archief (HUA) inv. 1102-1, no. 1221, Gedachten over het stichten eener zending in Bolaang Mongondow, Wilken en Schwarz, 23 December 1866, 4.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Reid, "Religion in Early Modern Southeast Asia: Synthesising Global and Local," *Religion, Tradition and the Popular: Transcultural Views from Asia and Europe*, 52. The same argument can be found in Reid, "Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: The Critical Phase, 1550-1650," in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era*; Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*; and more recently in Anthony Reid, "Early Modernity as Cosmopolis: Suggestions from Southeast Asia," in *Delimiting Modernities: Conceptual Challenges and Regional Responses*, ed. Sven Trakulhun and Ralph Weber, 124-141 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).
[21] Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41, no. 2 (1971).

> The rapid economic expansion of Southeast Asia's long 16th century pulled many away from their local agricultural roots, and made a portable, universal religious code attractive.[22]

The cosmopolitan environment as a crucial factor for conversion resonates with Victor Lieberman's view that "Islam […] like Theravada Buddhism and Philippine Christianity offered not only powerful prophylactic rituals, but a predictable moral universe responsive to individual action. To those facing novel hazards of the market and urbanization, such messages may have been particularly comforting."[23]

However, conversions involved more politics than the "expanding horizon theory" could accommodate. Discussing Horton's African example, David Owusu-Ansah notes that "despite many contacts with both Muslims and Christians during this period […] neither Islamic nor Christian conversion took place in nineteenth century Asante."[24] He points out that "what is not discussed in Horton's proposition is the degree to which the political and economic interests of traditional authorities had on the level of adaptation in the African community."[25] Similarly, Heather Sutherland commenting on the Islamization of early modern Makassar—traditionally explained in the literature as a result of the rise of a local bourgeoisie and cosmopolitanism[26]—warns of the danger in "linking complex concepts—'cosmopolitanism,' 'bourgeois' and 'conversion'—in a simple causal chain."[27]

In north Sulawesi, particularly Minahasa, the period which witnessed increasing commercialization and integration into international markets—and indeed mass conversions—was characterized not by cosmopolitanism (at least among commoners) but by restrictions to mobility and preclusion from an incipient urban life. As Henley notes, since the imposition of compulsory coffee deliveries in the 1820s the *walak* [Minahasan district]

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[22] Reid, "Religion in Early Modern Southeast Asia: Synthesising Global and Local," *Religion, Tradition and the Popular: Transcultural Views from Asia and Europe*, 52.

[23] *Victor Lieberman, Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830 vol. 2, Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 813.

[24] David Owusu-Ansah, "Islamization Reconsidered: An Examinaton of Asante Responses to Muslim Influence in the 18th and 19th Centuries" (paper presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Washington, D.C., November 4-7, 1982, 1982), 12.

[25] Ibid. 11.

[26] See Anthony Reid, "A Great Seventeenth Century Indonesian Family: Matoaya and Pattingalloang of Makassar," *Masyarakat Indonesia* 8, no. 1 (1981); Anthony Reid, "Pluralism and Progress in Seventeenth-century Makassar," in *Authority and Enterprise: Transactions, Traditions and Texts among the Bugis, Makassarese and Selayarese*, ed. C. van Dijk and Roger Tol, 433-149 (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000).

[27] Heather Sutherland, "Pursuing the Invisible, Makassar, City and Systems," in *Environment, Trade and Society in Southeast Asia: A Longue Duree Perspective*, ed. David Henley and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 144.

became a “more thoroughly closed community than it had ever been in independent times.”[28] Minahasans were prohibited from moving to a different settlement without a special pass.[29] The uplander Minahasans who migrated to the coastal—and perhaps more “cosmopolitan”—settlement of Bolaang under the jurisdiction of the raja of Bolaang-Mongondow were constantly forced to return to their former abodes by the Resident of Menado who was likely acting at the instigation of the migrants’ respective former Minahasan chiefs.[30] Thus, the case of Minahasa mirrors Java, where the cultivation system strengthened local village authority and intensified the control of economically-driven mobility.[31]

3. Comprehensive social crisis theory

This influential theory, often invoked to explain Christian conversions in Sulawesi and elsewhere in Indonesia, emphasizes the breakdown of traditional social and political order that consequently conditioned the mass of population to convert. For instance, writing on the causality of the conversion of the Toraja of Central Sulawesi, Bigalke argues that

> The outlawing of headhunting and trial by ordeal, abolition of the slave trade, and forced resettlement (“kampong forming”)...had given the traditional order a shock from which it would never recover...[T]hrough its various modifications of tradition, the government had succeeded in loosening people from their animism while providing them nothing directly to replace it. In this anomic state, “[the Torajan] himself waits for something to replace” his earlier beliefs...the mission would provide that something in the wake of government-induced social change.[32]

This view has had a long genealogy in the scholarly literature on Indonesia. As early as 1929, Albert C. Kruyt, the pioneer missionary in central Sulawesi, argued that the drastic colonial intervention on the social life of the Torajans (for example, forced relocation to lowlands, shift to wet-rice agriculture, and prohibition of headhunting, among others) caused “spiritual uncertainty” among the people because the “religious rites which for generations they had performed to invoke strength and success in their conflict with nature, had been taken away

[28] David Henley, “Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context: Minahasa in the Dutch East Indies” (Australian National University, 1992), 74.
[29] Ibid.
[30] ANRI Manado inv. 15, no. 2, Letter of RM to the raja of BM, 5 February 1827.
[31] See Albert Schrauwers, "The “Benevolent” Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001).
[32] Terence Bigalke, "Government and Mission in the Torajan World of Makale-Rantepao," *Indonesia* 38, (October 1984): 93.

from them."[33] Because of such spiritual uncertainty, "the people turned to the missionaries, whom they knew were kindly disposed towards them and who spoke their language and knew their *adat* [traditions]."[34] Kruyt's view resonates in the writings of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz on contemporary conversions in Bali. Geertz sees Balinese conversions to world religions "as a result of a thorough shaking of the foundations of social order."[35] Christian conversions in nineteenth century Java were likewise assumed to have been due to a widespread social crisis at the time. One scholar contends that the "appeal of Christianity among Javanists was related to a general crisis of authority and identity shaking Javanese society." He states that

> In an earlier era, when the Dutch had not yet emasculated the courts, much of the Javanese population had looked to aristocrats (*priyayi*) for models of cultural excellence and moral anchors for their identity. In the early nineteenth century however, the Dutch incorporated this aristocracy into the machinery of colonial exploitation, stripping them of many of their privileges and cutting them off from the rest of the population.[36]

This view is also popular among scholars of north Sulawesi. In Kurt Tauchmann's oft-cited study of Minahasan religion, he argued that the "[traditional] religious basis was destroyed so that the conversion to Christianity was the only possible way out to fill a religious vacuum."[37]

Schouten reiterates this view more recently. She argues that "one reason for the massive adherence to Christianity might have been cultural disorientation."[38] She states that

> The prohibition of headhunting raids by the colonial government heralded the disappearance of a fundamental aspect of Minahasan's lives and world view….Under these circumstances, for many Minahasans the step towards Christianity and the acceptance of the way of life of the Dutch might well have been a strategy to overcome their cultural disorientation and social and economic distress.[39]

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[33] Albert C. Kruyt, "The Influence of Western Civilisation on the Inhabitants of Poso (Central Celebes)," in *The Effect of Western Influence on Native Civilisations in the Malay Archipelago*, ed. B. Schrieke (Batavia: G. Kolff, 1929), 6.
[34] Ibid.
[35] See Clifford Geertz, "'Internal Conversion' in Contemporary Bali," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 170-189 (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Quotation from Robert Hefner, "The Political Economy of Islamic Conversion in Modern East Java," in *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 72.
[36] Hefner, "Of Faith and Commitment: Christian Conversion in Muslim Java,"*Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, 108.
[37] Cited in Helmut Buchholt, "Christian Mission and Social Development," in *Kolonien und Missionen, Referate des 3. Internationalen Kolonialengeschichtlichen Symposiums 1993 in Bremen*, ed. Wilfried Wagner (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1994), 312. See Kurt Tauchmann, "Die Religion der Minahasa-Stämme (Nordost-Celebes/Sulawesi)" (PhD. Dissertation, Universitat zu Köln, 1968).
[38] Schouten, "Minahasa (North Sulawesi): The 'Success Story' of Dutch Colonialism in Indonesia "*In Permanent Transit: Discourses and Maps of the Intercultural Experience*, 216-217.
[39] Ibid.

This theory is often used to explain Christian conversions. However, parallel arguments underlining a massive, albeit internally-induced, social upheaval, as the cause for Islamic conversions in early modern Southeast Asia have also been put forward, but they have had little traction.[40]

In contrast, some scholars view these social transformations not as a collapse of the traditional order but as a necessary consequence of a centralizing, albeit imposed, authority of the state. There was no comprehensive crisis as such but a mere reconfiguration of political power. As a case in point—whereas Geertz considers the "shaking of the social order" leading to a "general loss of faith in localized divinities"[41] as the foremost cause of contemporary conversions in Bali, Hefner sees "the island's incorporation into the Indonesian nation-state" as the main driving force.[42] Similarly, one could view the nineteenth century inroads of Christianity in Java to be less attributable to a "general crisis of authority and identity shaking Javanese society"[43] and more to the extension of the "[colonial] state's power ever deeper into village life" that sought to "routinize and legitimate the new village-level disciplinary measures."[44]

In north Sulawesi, one could also argue a parallel case where, despite the forced coffee cultivation and intensive colonial interference in local affairs, the ensuing social transformations did not necessarily constitute a massive social crisis as such. For instance, it has been noted in Minahasa that

> If, despite their attempts, the community no longer seemed to support the old religion, then the [pre-Christian] religious specialist [likely chiefs themselves] often made the same choice as others, or rather attempted to be ahead of them and to occupy a prominent position in the new religious system [Christianity].[45]

Like Java in the same period, the authority of supra-village chiefs—in contrast to what the social crisis theory would suggest—seem to have become more entrenched as the colonial state expanded its reach into the hinterland.

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[40]See Fred R. Von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia: Burma, Indonesia, The Philippines* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 9; Alatas, "On the Need for an Historical Study of Malaysian Islamization."

[41] Hefner, "The Political Economy of Islamic Conversion in Modern East Java,"*Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, 72-73.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Hefner, "Of Faith and Commitment: Christian Conversion in Muslim Java,"*Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, 108.

[44] Schrauwers, "The 'Benevolent' Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia," 318-219, 324.

[45] Schouten, *Leadership and Social Mobility in a Southeast Asian Society: Minahasa, 1677-1983*, 109.

4. Missionary theory

The "missionary theory" foregrounds the decisive role of either Christian or Muslim religious figures. The voluminous published missionary literature, perhaps inevitably, often accords the causative factor on the labors of its own missionaries in the successes of conversion.[46] However, during the key incidents of both Islamic and Christian mass conversions in north Sulawesi, religious authority figures seem to have had an inconsequential role. During the self-declared conversion of around 10,000 Tonsea (Minahasa) people in 1857,[47] there was only one (European) missionary present.[48] Moreover, there were only eight missionaries[49] in the entire region (Minahasa) that had roughly 100,000 inhabitants.[50] Furthermore, in Sangir-Talaud "entire villages convert[ed] to Christianity" in the late nineteenth century, in the initial period of colonial governmental presence, often without previous missionary effort at all.[51]

Behind the narrative of missionary triumph, as colonial functionaries themselves reveal, there was often the under-recognized political sub-plot.[52] The building of churches and schools hinged upon the willingness of the colonial government, but it also depended critically on the relationship of the government with the local village and district chiefs. The fact that the presence of the missionaries did not assure conversion despite the colonial government's support is illustrated by the case of the remote Talaud Island. Lamenting the lack of an effective local (indigenous) governmental structure in Talaud that could assure security of life at the very least and comparing it to the more complex political system of the adjacent islands of Sangir, the missionary J. Ottow writes

> Not only were the [Christian] missionaries destined for Talaud not [welcomed and] fetched by the Talaud chiefs, but they were also anticipated with arms by the Talaud

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[46] The most accessible of these publications (for Christianity in Indonesia) is, of course, the missionary journal, *Mededeelingen vanwege het Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap* (Bulletin of the Dutch Missionary Society).

[47] Kipp, "Two Views of the Minahasa; or, Whatever Happened to the Poor, Heathen Bush Natives?," 603.

[48] Nationaal Archief (NA), Ministerie van Koloniën (MvK), inv. 2.10.02, no. 5969, Kabinetsverbaal, 14 Jun 1864 V5, Aangaande de beschuldiging dat ik mijne onderhoorigen zou gedwongen hebben de christelijke godsdienst te omhelzen, O. J. Pelenkahu, Manado 18 Jan 1862.

[49] ANRI Manado inv. 48, no. 4, Politiek Verslag 1857 (RM Jansen), 10.

[50] Henley, *Fertility, Food and Fever: Population, Economy and Environment in North and Central Sulawesi, 1600-1930*, 170.

[51] See Het Utrechts Archief (HUA), Archief Raad van de Zending (ARvdZ), inv. 1102-1, no. 2828, Zending op de Talaud-eilanden [1898], Den Houter.

[52] See National Archives, The Hague (NA) Ministerie van Koloniën 1850-1900, inv. 2.10.02, no. 701 (1858), April 14, no. 2, "Letter of the Resident of Menado," A. L. Andriessen, 28 July 1853. See also (on another region of Indonesia), James J. Fox, "The 'Movement of the Spirit' in the Timor Area: Christian Traditions and Ethnic Identities," in *Indonesia: The Making of a Culture* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1980), 241-242.

> [peoples]. In Sangir, there were six well-ordered chiefdoms. In Talaud, there is only anarchy. Each village is autonomous; some villages are even divided internally. Each house is a separate chiefdom; a house consists of between six to twenty families.[53]

Because it had no supra-village political structure, there was no palpable missionary success in Talaud. The importance, or more precisely the decisiveness, that local rulers and effective political patrons played in conversion is also apparent in the Islamization in Bolaang-Mongondow during the early 1870s.

The itinerant, mystical Arab figure known as Imam Syafii, credited as being instrumental in the conversion of many previously animist uplanders of Mongondow,[54] owed his activities to the sponsorship of the raja, J. M. Manoppo. Raja Manoppo not only gave his own slaves to Imam Syafii to be the latter's assistants, he also personally accompanied the Imam to the remote (yet converted) parts of his realm. However, Imam Syafii was forced to leave Mongondow after he supposedly fell from Raja Manoppo's favor. [55]

These examples highlight the importance, perhaps even the indispensability, of a stabilizing political figure or structure to support the presence of religious missionaries. This is most acutely exemplified in Sulawesi by the conversion of the Torajas. The pioneer missionaries, A. C. Kruyt and N. Adriani, had "more than a decade of fruitless preaching to an uncolonised peoples,"[56] but the arrival of "pacifying" Dutch colonial troops "enabled them [missionaries] to reap a famous evangelical success."[57]

5. Trade theory

One popular theory of Islamic conversions in particular is the "trade theory" or versions of such.

Various proponents espouse the idea that "Islam appeared not as a conquering political force, but as a converting cultural force."[58] One scholar asserts that conversions were

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[53] "Uit een brief van J. Ottow, zendeling op de Talau-eilanden," *Geillustreerd Zendingsblad voor het Huisgezin*, (1891).

[54] See Kosel, "Christian Mission in an Islamic Environment: Religious Conversion in North Sulawesi in the Light of a Case-study from Bolaang Mongondow."

[55] NA Memorie van Overgave inv. 2.10.39, no. 299, Resident of Menado P. van der Crab (1875); NA Mailrapporten 1876, no. 109, Invoering van rechtstreeks bestuur in de afd. Gorontalo, Letter of RM [van Musschenbroek?] 15 Jan 1876 to GG, Menado.

[56] David Henley, *Jealousy and Justice: The Indigenous Roots of Colonial Rule in North Sulawesi* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2002), 88.

[57] Ibid.

[58] "Islam in Indonesia: Where to? Interview with Abdurrahman Wahid," *Inside Indonesia: Bulletin of the Indonesia Resources and Information Programme (Australia)*October 1986, 4.

achieved "through trade and commerce and not by the sword as erroneously reported by some orientalists."[59] Besides "of all the major world religions, Islam is arguably the most commerce friendly, at least as seen from the perspectives of its scriptures."[60]

While it is generally acknowledged that Islam spread in Southeast Asia via trade networks,[61] the direct, causal relationship between trade and Islamic conversion remains largely unexplained.[62] Indeed scholars have noted the substantial time-gap between the established presence of traders in various port-polities of Indonesia and the conversion of its rulers.[63] John Bowen remarks that the 500-year gap between "signs of Islamic presence…. and the first conversions to Islam by [Acehnese] rulers" "was embarrassing to many Indonesian Muslims, who ask that if Islam is naturally attractive to all, why did conversion take so long?"[64] Aceh's case is not exceptional. Makassar's rulers converted "comparatively late" in 1605 when its "contacts with both Muslims and Christian foreigners were already well-developed."[65]

At the cornerstone of this theory is the notion that rulers—and by extension, their subjects—convert "to participate in the growing international Islamic trade network."[66] Christine Dobbin's work on Minangkabau elaborates on this idea:[67]

> Islam and its legal system were at hand to provide the foundations of [...] a moral community, enabling commercial networks to function on the basis of both trust and law...it can be seen that those engaging in a network of market relations far wider than the earlier exchange relationships among a group of villages required a mutually

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[59] Mohd. Musib M. Buat, "Muslim Businesses in Mindanao," in *The Muslim Private Sector in Southeast Asia*, ed. Mohammed Ariff (Singapore: ISEAS, 1991), 45-46.

[60] Robert W. Hefner, "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (2010): 1037.

[61] Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade in World History*, Studies in Comparative World History (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 103.

[62] See Barbara Watson and Leonard Y. Andaya Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 53.

[63] See, among others, G. R. Tibbetts, "Early Muslim Traders in South-East Asia," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 177 (1957): 44.

[64] Bowen, "Narrative Form and Political Incorporation: Changing Uses of History in Aceh, Indonesia," 681-682.

[65] Reid, "A Great Seventeenth Century Indonesian Family: Matoaya and Pattingalloang of Makassar," 13.

[66] Peter Riddell, "The Implanting of Islam in Southeast Asia," in *More Islamic than We Admit: Insights into Philippine Cultural History*, ed. Isaac Donoso (Quezon City: Vibal Foundation, 2014), 69.

[67] Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*, Monograph series / Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, (London: Curzon Press, 1983); Christine E. Dobbin, *Kebangkitan Islam dalam ekonomi petani yang sedang berubah: Sumatra Tengah, 1784-1847*, Seri INIS (Jakarta: INIS, 1992).

> acceptable code of conduct which would facilitate business transactions and assist "mutual recognition".[68]

Dobbin's Islamization argument provides more concrete evidence to parallel observations in the early modern period which witnessed the "incorporation of Islamic commercial law into all the Malay legal codes" and the "dispersion of Arabic script, with Arabic borrowings for such terms as *paper, ink, bankruptcy*, and *usury."*[69]

However, nineteenth-century Sulawesi tends to diverge even from Dobbin's contemporary case in Sumatra. In coastal north Sulawesi, the colonial government—rather than Islam—provided the most important security of life and property among foreign traders.[70] Muslim and Christian traders alike sought the arbitration of the colonial authorities for the defaulting Mongondorese.[71] For example, Manado-based creditor-merchants repeatedly demanded government intervention to force the raja of Bolaang-Mongondow, A. C. Manoppo, to pay his outstanding debts.[72] The Resident of Manado noted that

> It is risky to give credit to these people [of the north coast of Sulawesi]; the [Muslim] Buginese are successful because of their threat of violence (kris) or of their use of one of the debtor's relatives as guarantor; otherwise, the debtor runs to the interior and transfer residence; this is the reason why trade is completely in the hands of the Buginese and Mandarese; the Menadonese merchants have withdrawn from the north coast.[73]

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[68] Christine Dobbin, "Economic Change in Minangkabau as a Factor in the Rise of the Padri Movement, 1784-1830," *Indonesia* 23, (1977): 38.

[69] A. J. S. Reid, "John Smail, Jacob van Leur, and the Trading World of Southeast Asia," in *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993), 90.

[70] A revealing case is that of the Buginese Prince Matoka from Bone (South Sulawesi) who—along with his followers—violently plundered a stranded Japanese ship in Bolaang Uki. The silk-laden ship including its crew was burned after being looted. The *jogugu* of Bolaang Uki and seventeen others were convicted of collusion in the crime. They were sentenced to force labor. Meanwhile, Prince Matoka, who directed the crime alongside two others, were executed in Manado. ANRI Manado inv. 29, no.2 Politiek Verslag der Residentie Menado 1864. Visiting missionaries noted that for the inhabitants in the region, it remains a wonder why such an act was condemned because the ship was "neither European, Chinese or Arab," suggesting perhaps of the local understanding that security of traders only extended to the three groups. HUA ArvdZ inv. 1102-1, no. 1221, N. Ph. Wilken and J. A. T. Schwarz, Verhaal naar Bolang Oeki, 19 January 1867.

[71] See, for instance, the case "Schuld Mongondowezen Lamoto, Laingi, c.s.aan Daeng Pateka te Wajo, 1892-93." ANRI Manado inv. 42, no. 5. Unfortunately, this bundle was still missing at the time of research.

[72] ANRI Manado inv. 48, no. 4, Politiek Verslag der Residentie Menado, 1859.

[73] ANRI Manado inv. 48, no. 4, Politiek Verslag der Residentie Menado, 1860.

Even in the relatively long-Islamized Buol, which was "completely under the influence of Arabs and Bugis,"[74] some foreign (mostly Bugis) traders—for fear of life and security of property—still would "sell their merchandise from [the safety of their own] prau."[75]

It is important to highlight the fact that trade could and did exist as a field separate from religion. A missionary who wrote about nineteenth-century Christian Minahasan chiefs stated that conversion itself was not in any way a prerequisite to trade. He noted that

> Numerous chiefs, district [supra-village] chiefs especially, deal with Muslim traders, not because of their eagerness with Islam, but because of the goods brought by these traders. These goods are traded on credit…[76]

More contemporary evidence elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago echoes this idea. Writing on Muslims in Lombok, Sven Cederroth observes that "itinerant venders [sic]…have been more successful as implementers of change in the economic field than in the field of religious conversion."[77] Indeed as J. Noorduyn asserts, the reason for the "often sudden and massive conversion could not be found in trade and traders."[78] An even more cogent example of the separation of trade and religion are the Chinese in the broader region. They were economically dominant but culturally uninfluential.

Trade as an instrument for and motivation to conversion among the mass of the population becomes more untenable if one considers the political economy of small polities in north Sulawesi, where trade was largely in the hands of the coastal raja.

Direct contacts between Muslim traders and the masses in the populous hinterland were likely minimal, if any. The scholar-functionary, J. G. F. Riedel, explains that

> The itinerant traders, mainly Bugis, prefer to connect with the raja [of Bolaang-Mongondow] because he purchases the bulk of their goods. The raja then sells these goods at very high prices in the hinterland where nobody is allowed to trade. [79]

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[74] J. G. F. Riedel, "Het landschap Boeool; Korte aantekeningen," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 18, (1872): 197.
[75] Riedel, "Het landschap Boeool; Korte aantekeningen," 200.
[76] HUA 1102-1, 1186, Letter of J. A. T. Schwarz to the Director of the Nederlandsch-Zendelinggenootschap (NZG), 1877.
[77] Sven Cederroth, *The Spell of the Ancestors and the Power of Mekkah: A SasakCcommunity on Lombok* (Göteborg University, 1981), 250.
[78] J. Noorduyn, "De Islamisering van Makassar," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 112, no. 3 (1956): 247.
[79] J. G. F. Riedel, "Het landschap Bolaang Mongondow," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 13, (1864): 283.

Even when allowed, trade carried inherent political disincentives that would have limited its unbridled expansion. An aspiring chief risked non-election if he was indebted to traders. For instance, among the Torajas

> Someone heavily indebted to the coastal Muslim traders would not be chosen by fellow villagers as chief for fear that he would abuse his [power] in order to repay his debts…[80]

This "dilemma of chiefly trade" likely applied for the three lower-ranking upland chiefs (*panghulu*) of Mongondow[81] who were still "appointed according to the decision of the [village] elders."[82]

How can the rise of a perennially indebted coastal raja from a consultative system that inherently discouraged the appointment of a ruler *qua* trader be explained?
The "dilemma of chiefly trade" in Bolaang-Mongondow was circumvented by outside political intervention. The Dutch East India Company, and later the colonial government, accorded coercive power to a single chief in order to facilitate rule. As a consequence, the direct accountability of the chief towards his people, most of all to his peers, weakened. Loyalty to higher authorities—rather than freedom from debt—became an important criterion for election. With arms and legitimation supplied by higher authorities, the raja could thus accrue debt from (Muslim) traders and enforce a tributary relationship with his subjects, notwithstanding the risk of discontent among his people.

Although the "trade theory" is more commonly applied to Islamic conversions, one could hypothesize why this theory has not gained explanatory currency for Christian conversions. As in Bolaang-Mongondow, the chiefs in Minahasa and Sangir-Talaud sought to monopolize the flow of export produce from the villages. During the initial decades of the forced coffee cultivation in Minahasa, which not only witnessed the steady flow of rice and coffee to the coastal port but also the entrance of European Christian missionaries into the upland, historical sources point to the migration of a segment of the Minahasan population to adjacent Bolaang, where the colonial state had negligible presence. These Minahasan migrants likely migrated because of the increasingly effective—and unjust—monopoly by

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[80] N. Adriani, "De Hoofden der Toradja's van Midden-Celebes " *Indisch Genootschap: Verslagen der Algemeene Vergaderingen*, (1915-1916): 118. A similar point is made in N. Adriani, "Maatschappelijke, speciaal economische verandering der bevolking van Midden-Celebes, sedert der invoering van het Nederlandsch gezag aldaar," *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 32, (1915): 463.
[81] "Lower-ranking" means immediately below the raja.
[82] Riedel, "Het landschap Bolaang Mongondow," 279. One exception is the *panghulu* of the gold-mining district of Kotabunan who was not elected by its village elders but by the raja or his immediate associates.

their Christianized chiefs of the prices of coffee and especially rice. Indeed, in Bolaang, these Minahasan migrants were known to sell their rice at likely higher prices than in Minahasa under the system of obligatory rice deliveries.[83] In sum, the "attraction to trade" cannot exclusively explain mass Christian conversions as the first and most important converts to Christianity—the chiefs themselves—were likely oppressive figures of local political authority.[84]

6. Marriage theory

Marriage, especially to (Arab) traders, is memorialized in numerous narratives in the Indonesian archipelago as the primary reason for (elite) conversion. The scholar-official, R. O. Winstedt, suggests that a key in understanding Islamization is the "study of the genealogies of the ruling families of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and even Mindanao."[85] The historian, Engseng Ho, argues that these foreign Muslim—particularly the Hadhrami Arabs—were fully integrated into the economic and political lives of Indonesian polities.[86]

However, north Sulawesi elites draw less legitimacy from affinal ties with prestigious Arab lines than from the vertical association with the colonial government and horizontal ties with powerful families in the region.

Although the regnant line of rajas in Gorontalo (the Monoarfas)[87] claimed descent from a putative Arab ancestor, persons who had demonstrable and close affinal relations with a *sayyid* (sheikh) line were in fact excluded from power. The originally non-aristocratic, *sada* were accommodated with improvised honorific titles as *tuani daä* (great lord) or *tuani kiki* (lesser lord)[88] and accorded the honor of sitting next to the raja in public gatherings. However, because of their foreign descent they could not be rulers of the realm.[89] (This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

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[83] KITLV H 70 Verslagen uit het Gouvernement der Molukken, Verslag van de Residentie Manado over den jaar 1829; Resident D. W. Pietermaat, 31 December 1829, 39.
[84] Ibid.
[85] R. O. Winstedt, "The Advent of Muhammadanism in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 77, (1917): 175.
[86] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[87] KITLV H 1345, W. J. M. Michielsen Herinneringen, Dl. 2: In Gouvernements Dienst. Ambtenaar ter beschikking residentie Menado, 33.
[88] KIT Collection – UB Leiden, BrRG 26, Het Volk van Gorontalo, A. N. Datau, n.d., 14.
[89] Richard Tacco, *Het Volk van Gorontalo (Historisch, traditioneel, maatschappelijk, cultureel, sociaal, karakteristiek en economisch) [uitgegeven vanwege de Vereeniging "Gorontalo-Instituut"]* (Gorontalo: Yo Un Ann & Co., 1935), 32.

In Bolaang-Mongondow, as in Gorontalo, descent from or marriage to an Arab *sayyid* line was likewise inconsequential to paramount rulership. If local histories and genealogies of Bolaang-Mongondow are considered a measure, then they indicate that marriage between foreign Arabs and local aristocratic women did not occupy as prominent a role in local political legitimacy as in the neighboring Islamized polities of Maguindanao or Sulu.[90] Indeed, in one of the extant genealogies of the Mongondow indigenous elite (see Figure 4.1. A genealogy of Bolaang-Mongondow chiefs), one of the first, if not the first, marriage of an aristocratic Mongondorese woman (Putri Sarah) to an Arab (Syarif Aluwi) in the 1830s is missing. Yet, in some sources, this marriage was identified as the beginning of Islam in Mongondow.[91]

Whereas there is little remembrance accorded to the milestone that supposedly marked the entrance of Islam into Bolaang-Mongondow, the marriage of the storied raja of Siau, Jacob Ponto, to Inontat Manoppo, the daughter of Sultan Jacobus Manoppo, in 1850 was not only commemorated in the royal genealogy but it remained in popular memory as well.[92] However, the accounts of the marriages of Syarif Aluwi and Raja Jacob Ponto to Mongondorese noble women shared the same striking feature—their reference to the bride price.

Syarif Aluwi is remembered to have left for Donggala after failing to fulfill the customary bride price (*harta*) demanded by the *jogugu* (second-ranking chief) of Bolaang.[93] On the contrary, Raja Ponto is known to have presented lavish gifts to the Bolaang elite. These included luxurious textiles, jewelry, cannons, firearms, slaves, and various implements for holding (competitive) feasts such as plates and bowls—all of which reinforce the aristocratic status of the bride.[94] These gifts were divided equally between the bride and the raja and his fellow chiefs.

One could argue that marriages, especially aristocratic ones, were primarily economic based. Marriages between traders and the local aristocracy were channels for the indigenous elite to access commercial wealth while providing the trader market access to the locality. Since marriages to wealthy merchants were imbued with economic and attendant status-based

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[90] See Elsa Clavé, "Lignées et légitimité politique dans le sultanat de Magindanao (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)," *Peninsule: Etudes interdisciplinaires sur l'Asie du Sud-Est Péninsulaire* 71, no. 2 (2015). And more extensively in Elsa Clavé, "La malayisation du Sud philippin (XVe-XIXe siècles); Recherches historiques appuyées sur l'analyse des sources narratives et juridiques des sultanats de Sulu (c. 1450-c. 1900) et de Mindanao (c. 1520-c. 1900)" (Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2013).

[91] Riedel, "Het landschap Bolaang Mongondow," 277-278.

[92] HUA inv. 1102-1, no. 1186, Wilken and Schwarz, 22 March 1867, Sonder, 2.

[93] HUA inv. 1102-1, no. 1186, Wilken and Schwarz, 22 March 1867, Sonder, 25.

[94] HUA inv. 1102-1, no. 1186, Wilken and Schwarz, 22 March 1867, Sonder, 25.

meanings, they were likely monopolized by and occurred at least initially within local elite circles. In addition, Bolaang-Mongondow elites, like other local elites in the region practiced endogamy based on status.[95] Besides, even if societies in the region allowed cross-rank marriages, it is likely that the quantity and value of the bride wealth one could muster limited one's option to marry above one's economic standing.[96] Consequently, it would have been unlikely for the Islamicized elites to marry en masse lower-status subjects and cause mass conversions. On the other hand, could marriages between Muslim traders and common people account for mass conversions?

Commercial contacts—let alone marriage—between traders and the common people would have been very limited because trade was a chiefly monopoly and traders themselves were prohibited from entering the populous hinterland.[97] However, sources suggest that the raja of Bolaang had allowed Bugis and Gorontalese traders to enter upland Kotabunan[98] in the beginning of the nineteenth century.[99] Two of these traders were the religious figures named *hakim* Bagus and *imam* Suweko (or Tuweko), who succeeded in converting "some slaves and local women with whom they married." [100] However, it seems that such converts only included their slaves and those within the sphere of their respective families. It substantiates B. Schrieke's observation long ago that "it is impossible that the Islamization of the archipelago can have been the result simply and solely of marriages contracted by a group of foreigners who compared to the great mass of the population were numerically unimportant."[101]

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[95] A short way for understanding marriage pattern in the region, that likely applied to north Sulawesi as well, is: "endogamy of rank and exogamy of village." See Dana Rappoport, *Songs from the Thrice-Blooded Land: Ritual Music of the Toraja Sulawesi (Indonesia)* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme / Éditions Épistèmes 2009).

[96] See the pivotal role of bride wealth in the pre-modern Indonesian setting, Peter Boomgaard, "Bridewealth and Birth Control: Low Fertility in the Indonesian Archipelago, 1500-1900," *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 2 (2003).

[97] Riedel, "Het landschap Bolaang Mongondow," 283.

[98] The village where the raja maintains his residence if he is not in coastal Bolaang.

[99] HUA inv. 1102-1, no. 1186, Wilken and Schwarz, 22 March 1867, Sonder, 24.

[100] HUA inv. 1102-1, no. 1186, Wilken and Schwarz, 22 March 1867, Sonder, 24.

[101] B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings of B. Schrieke*, Selected Studies on Indonesia by Dutch Scholars, vol. 3 Part 2 (The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1957), 231.

7. Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored some leading theories of Christian and Protestant conversions as they relate to the particular case of north Sulawesi. It highlighted, among others, the political interests of the local chiefs in conversion or non-conversion to world religions. Although the "bottom-up theory" likely illustrates a historical reality—the intention of the lower classes to convert to a socially prestigious religious identity—the actual dynamics of conversion were likely more complicated as the chiefly classes sought to prevent the other classes from accessing such identity. The "expanding horizon theory" emphasizes the attraction to cosmopolitanism, driven ultimately by exposure to foreign commerce, as the main cause of conversion to world religions. However, as other authors have pointed out, there were serious political barriers to gaining access to such cosmopolitan identities often posed by the local chiefly elite. Meanwhile, the "comprehensive social crisis theory" identifies the radical social and political changes to local society brought by colonialism that disrupted the local worldview. These dramatic social transformations were thought to have conditioned the natives to choose world religion (Christianity almost always) to cope with such changes. Social transformations notwithstanding, the local political hierarchy in north Sulawesi largely remained intact and sometimes became even more empowered in the wake of colonial rule. It remains questionable whether one can speak of a "social crisis" as such or simply a reconfiguration of social, economic, and political relations in the community, albeit in an unprecedented and often abrupt manner. The "missionary theory" suggests the crucial role of Christian or Islamic missionaries in conversion. On the contrary, this chapter presents examples from north Sulawesi which illustrate that the entrance of these missionaries was often under the aegis of local ruling figures. The "trade theory" posits that attraction to religion was due to the legal and political stability that it potentially offered. In a more general sense, it suggests that commerce provided an important conduit for cross-cultural interaction and religious exchange. However, as reiterated in the discussion on the "marriage theory" commercial exchanges were often—at least in the initial stages—largely confined to the local chiefly political *cum* commercial class. While converts very likely came about through commerce and marriage, the limited market opportunities for the rest of the population likely precluded their contacts with proselytizing traders.